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ROLLING
PRIVATE EYE
24 PAGE NEWS

WHILE British troops were risking their lives in southern Iraq, the ministry of defence was launching its own modest offensive at home.

It came in the shape of a green paper from junior minister Lewis Moonie. Its purpose? To outline how the government might cut future pension entitlements for service personnel by extending the age from which they can be claimed by those foolhardy enough to sign up for the Queen's shilling.

Brilliant timing or what?

THE reported death of Saddam Hussein's half brother Barzan al-Tikriti, if true, could have interesting consequences for the hunt for Saddam's suggested billions.

Many of those exiles and foreign advisers believed to have knowledge of the Saddam fortune were run by Barzan and held assets in their names or companies. With Barzan gone and Saddam on the run, the response to any request from their representatives or international investigators will no doubt be – what do you mean your/Saddam's money? That is unless they want to cut a deal in return for immunity and return to Iraq.

As reported in *Eye* 1076, one of those Iraqis likely to be quizzed will be the Swiss-based businessman Hussam Rassam, whom investigators have long linked to Barzan and Saddam's money trail. Rassam lives in some style outside Geneva.

He also has relatives in Britain who have two companies. With assets valued at more than £3m, both have a common Swiss shareholder. Both no doubt would firmly deny any links to the Saddam regime.

R.I.P

JOHN KENT

1937 - 2003

Private Eye cartoonist and caricaturist.

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ABC

TONY BLAIR has faced precious little resistance to his Iraq policy from within cabinet... but it has certainly riled former Tory prime minister Sir Edward Heath.

Alas, the identity of the former Labour cabinet minister who received a surprising call from the Grocer must remain a secret. Suffice to say the startled fellow picked up the phone only to hear an exasperated Heath splutter: "How do we get rid of him [Blair]?"

A BIG financial headache awaits Ian McCartney, the new Labour party chairman, whose job is to wrest more money from the brothers and sisters in the trades union movement.

The comrades are increasingly reluctant to bale the party out; and even if the union bosses wanted to help, the restive members don't. The party is poised to lose financial support from two of its union mainstays – the fire fighters (FBU) and railwaymen (RMT) – who are likely to disaffiliate from the party later this year.

"This 24-hour rolling tapestry is getting me down"

MEANWHILE McCartney's predecessor, John "The Hammer" Reid, has been sent to replace Robin Cook as leader of the House, putting paid to hope of any future Commons or Lords reform.

Reid is not only determined to draw a line under Cook's reforming agenda, but will brook no more dissent from Labour MPs over foundation hospitals and the like. He intends to work closely with chief whip Hilary Armstrong to make the lives of dissidents thoroughly unpleasant.

Reid's transformation from hard drinker and chain smoker to teetotaller is mirrored by his bizarre political odyssey. Not long ago he was a self-proclaimed supporter of the now defunct British Communist party. Today he's a fervent Blairite. As he limbers up to attack anti-war MPs for being "pro Saddam", he may have to explain to them why he thought it necessary to meet the ultra nationalist Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and the "Butcher of Srbrenica", General Ratko Mladic, back in the 1990s. Both are now sought in connection with known war crimes.

IN JULY 1998 Prudential chief executive Sir Peter Davis was called before the treasury select committee to be given a blistering dressing down by the then economic secretary Helen Liddell over his company's massive mis-selling of pensions in the previous decade.

Prudential was accused of negligence, incompetence, and deliberate cheating in persuading tens of thousands of customers to opt out of employer-run pensions in favour of inferior private schemes.

Last week Liddell's cabinet colleague, work and pensions minister Andrew Smith, announced the chair of the new Employer Task Force on Pensions, which aims to "identify and promote good practice in providing and promoting pensions" – none other than Sir Peter Davis, now boss of Labour's favourite supermarket, Sainsbury's.

According to Smith, "his extensive business experience will be a valuable asset in helping to make a success of future pension provision".

MUCH gnashing of teeth among the human rights lawyers at Matrix Chambers, where Cherie Booth QC has infuriated a number of colleagues with her support for husband Tony's decision to go to war with Iraq.

One colleague, Rabinder Singh QC, was even asked to furnish an opinion for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament on the legality or otherwise of the decision to go to war – an opinion that concluded such action could be illegal.

By contrast the legal opinion supplied to the government by attorney-general Lord Goldsmith QC argued the opposite. But since hardly anyone has seen all of his report – not even parliament itself – the proverbial jury is still out.

KEEN observers at the Royal Horseguards Hotel have been taking an interest in former cabinet minister Robin Cook's reading material.

Mr Cook, whose resignation as Leader of the House of Commons cost him the flat that goes with the job, was spotted by a fellow hotel guest carrying a copy of Michael Moore's anti-Bush tome, *Stupid White Men*.

THOSE who think the House of Commons is nothing more than a boys' club will be encouraged by the diligence members have shown over amendments to the sexual offences bill.

Highlighted copies of Hansard are circulating in the tea rooms and receiving much attention from MPs amused by Baroness Noakes' amendement to Clause 70, Line 1: "Leave out 'genitals' and insert 'penis'."

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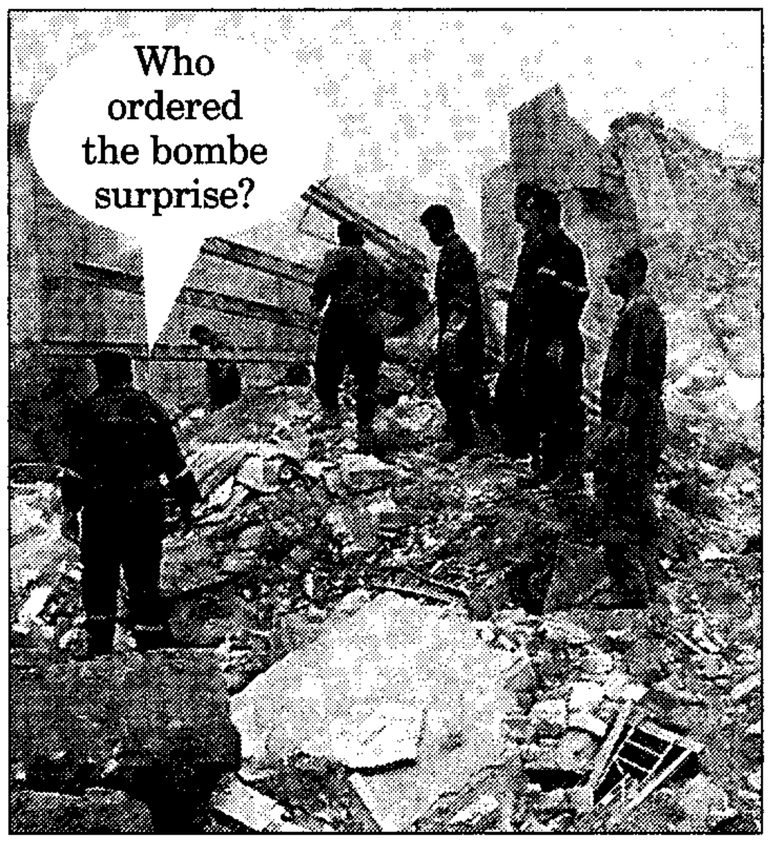
SADDAM RESTAURANT SHOCK



Street of Shame

DID Catherine Zeta Jones and Michael Douglas win or lose in the high court last week? Most papers agreed that the verdict was ambivalent. Although Mr Justice Lindsay allowed them to pursue their action against *Hello!* over "commercial confidentiality", he rejected nine of their 12 claims and said they had no right to damages for "breach of privacy".

For two national newspapers, however, there were no doubts. "Hollywood Stars Win Fight over Cheat Wedding Photos", the *Daily Express* reported jubilantly; while the *Daily Star*'s front-page splash was headlined: "ZETA WINS *OK!* Judge Raps Rival Mag Whose Pics Ruined Wedding".

OK! is of course owned by Richard "Dirty" Desmond, a point the *Star* absent-mindedly omitted from its three-page report. It even included lengthy quotations from Paul Ashford, billed as the "editorial director of *OK!* owners Northern & Shell", without mentioning that he is also editorial director of the *Daily Star*.

One wonders if the *Express* titles will give such epic coverage to Dirty Des's next high court battle – the lawsuit against his former chief porn-wallah Deric Botham. This epic smut-fest should have started in February, on the very same day as the Catherine'n'Michael case, but was delayed following a last-minute application from Desmond for "mediation". Despite all his stalling, however, it is now expected to begin in the autumn.

Dirty Des's lawyers seem not to relish the prospect. Two weeks ago they rang Deric Botham's solicitors to warn that they had acquired a "secret video" of Botham cavorting with naked women, which might be shown in court to prove his sleaziness – unless, of course, the defendant stopped contesting the action and admitted defeat now.

A typical Desmond tactic, of course – but he'll have to do better than that. There are hundreds of similar videos in existence – not least in the archives of Richard Desmond's own Fantasy television channel. As channel controller, Botham often had to "cavort" on-screen, wearing nothing but a ludicrous wig, because Dirty Des's shoestring budget prevented him hiring professional hunks.

Interestingly the moral crusader who supplied Desmond and his lawyers with the video of Botham in the altogether was one Peter Palmer, a photographer and film-maker. But how pure is Palmer himself? A couple of years ago he appeared on Dirty Des's "live porn" website with a nude model named Gabby. This was at a time when Des was befriending Tony Blair and "going respectable", and had therefore ordered the website controllers to tone down the content to *Watch With Mother* levels. Alas, Palmer somehow forgot his orders, and was seen live on the internet sticking his finger up Gabby's bottom!

REBEKAH Wade was unmoved by the resignation of *Sun* feature writer Katy Weitz over the paper's bloodthirsty war headlines – largely because she hadn't even met the hackette.

Not so deputy editor Fergus Shanahan, a rubicund tabloid man of the old school. On the day Weitz aired her criticisms in the *Grauniad*, a furious Shanahan stormed over to the *Sun* features desk. "Is Katy Weitz in today?" he demanded.

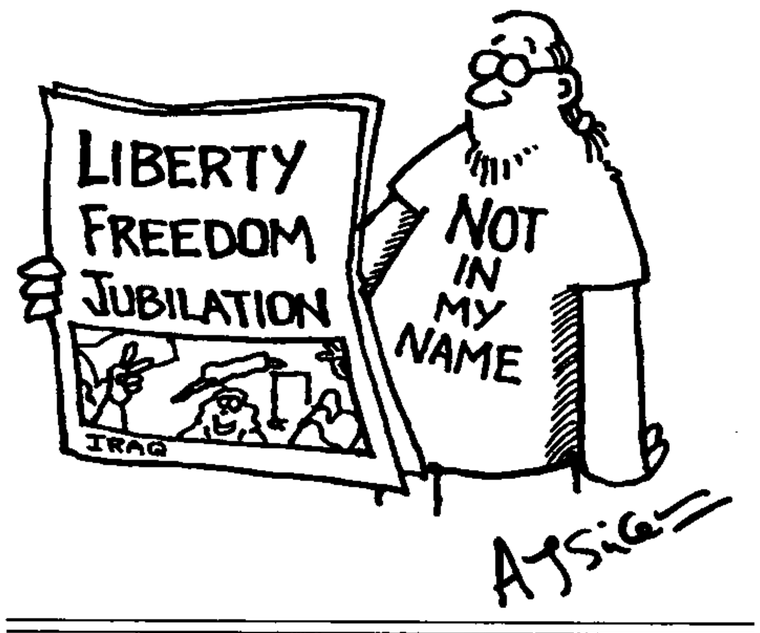
The cowering subordinates explained that she'd already quit. Shanahan was unimpressed. "Get her to come in," he roared. "So I can have the pleasure of kicking her out."

RESIDENTS of Aldershot and other army towns were alarmed to find a letter from *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade pushed through their letterboxes last week. Was the tireless vigilante alerting them to a child-molester in the area?

No, it was something far more tasteful: a marketing campaign cashing in on the anxieties of service families. "At the *Sun*, the thoughts of everyone are with Our Boys and Girls and the loved ones they have left at home," she cooed. "We know how important it is for newspapers to give unstinting support to our Forces and to the war effort. Those in the media who carp and criticise, or who swallow the propaganda of the enemy, are doing a huge disservice to the nation. The conduct of the *Daily Mirror* has shocked us..."

And off she went, into a lengthy rant against Piers Moron's rag, which "has let down all those who are serving so patriotically and so unselfishly during the war". At the *Sun*, she declared, "we want Our Forces to win – and then we want them home safe and sound", the implication being that the villainous *Mirror* would prefer them all dead. Service families therefore had a patriotic duty to buy the *Sun*, "the Number One choice for Our Boys and Girls and the only paper whose rock-solid support for them comes from the heart".

Clearly, however, the fact that something's heartfelt doesn't mean you shouldn't exploit it for profit by targeting potential widows and orphans. No doubt a herogram to Rebekah from the Digger is already on its way.



PIERS MORGAN'S LEARNING CURVE

"It had taken years of anguish, self-loathing and obstinate defiance, but I had finally done it. I had at last publicly apologised to a celebrity for making their life a misery."
— **Piers Morgan**, *Guardian*, April 2003.

"I personally slightly misjudged the way that you could be attitudinal on the front page in the way that we were, once the war actually started. I have never seen such a switch in public opinion." Morgan describes as "an interesting lesson learned" — the realisation that he had got the tone wrong once the bombs started falling.
— **Piers Morgan**, *Independent*, April 2003.

"I totally held my hands up and said the managerial responsibility failed completely. Completely. And made mugs of all of us... What was clear to me afterwards was it was bloody stupid of me to ever think that I could actively trade in the stock market and not at some stage come into conflict with the paper. We learned a very salutary lesson."
— **Piers Morgan**, *Guardian*, April 2001.

"When I first got here from the *News of the World*, my initial instinct was to try to go head to head with the *Sun*, which was a mistake. It misjudged the readership here, and that was a major moment for me personally. I might have got away with the 'Achtung! Surrender' stuff on the *Sun*, but you can't get away with it on the *Mirror*, and I've learnt some valuable lessons."
— **Piers Morgan**, *Independent*, December 1998

LUVVIES

"I'm an entertainer. This is my job. There are men, women, children and soldiers being killed right now. My job is to cheer them up."

PETER O'TOOLE
Grauniad

Submitted by Bob Heys.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

YET more evidence of the willingness of sports hacks to act as PR agents for Nike, as chronicled in our Nikewatch column (*Eye* 1075).

On 5 April the *Daily Mirror* featured an interview with long-distance runner Paula Radcliffe in New Mexico, where she was training for the London marathon. What the piece didn't mention was that sports hack John Cross had been flown out to Radcliffe's training camp, and enjoyed a pleasant break in the States, courtesy of his friends at Nike. When the finished article finally appeared, it naturally included a Nike plug, nudging readers interested in Radcliffe's training schedule in the direction of http://www.nikebowerman.com. The site in question, however, turns out to be little more than an advertising showcase and sales distribution outlet for the brand.

Ironically, only four days earlier the *Mirror* had reported on a finding published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* about the injurious effect of sports trainers on professional athletes. The study claimed that air-cushioned style footwear, contrary to the manufacturer's claims, failed to protect joints and was more likely to cause ankle injuries. The pioneers and "brand warriors" of air cushioning are, of course, Nike.

"WE don't do PR-led stuff; we do whatever the opposite is," announced the *Mirror*'s Jessica Callan when the 3am column was launched as a broadside at the world of craven celebrity coverage two years ago.

It's nice to see the 3am-ers sticking to their promises. Witness their coverage of the Oscars: "Special thanks to Virgin Atlantic for flying Jessica and Niki to LA for the ceremony. As always, the service was of the highest order, which probably explains why so many stars choose to fly with them. Thanks guys."

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Wales are the new Republic of Ireland." — Mark Lawrenson, BBC radio Five Live.

"Flexibility is the new stability." — Budget analysis by BBC economics editor Evan Davies.

"Why bad is the new good." — *News of the World.*

"Encyclopedias are the new novels." — *Observer* books section.

"After all, 60 is the new 40." — Lynda Snell on her husband's 60th birthday, *The Archers.*

"The cafetiere is the new teapot." — PG Tips advert.

"Historic buildings could become the new *Pop Idols*." — Simon Thurley, chief executive of English Heritage, *The Times.*

"Fishing is rumoured to be the new yoga."— *Norfolk Journal and East Anglian Life.*

ACCORDING to the *Grauniad*'s David Leigh and Brian Whitaker, details of the collapse of Ahmad Chalabi's Petra Bank were "known to only a few people" before they "obtained" the details for their exposé.

A few people, that is – plus all those who had read the detailed account of the bank's collapse published in the *Eye* four weeks earlier.

FLAK-WATCH

Mentioned in Dispatches

■ **22 March:** Former gossip columnist Ross Benson is in Baghdad for the *Daily Mail*, and throughout the campaign his breathless reports will bring home the full horror of war for a Fleet Street hack miles from the nearest wine bar. "I get a taste of Saddam's terror every night," he reveals today. "Saddam's bully-boys are now scouring my dosshouse of an hotel looking for satellite telephones… Several phones have been confiscated." But the plucky correspondent keeps a sense of proportion. "The situation is hardly noticeably better for the five million Iraqis who remain in this city," he concedes.

■ **25 March:** "By this morning, the Americans could be in the desert outside Baghdad, scarcely 20 miles from the city," Robert Fisk reports in the *Independent*. "But in military terms – unless they batter their way in – they might as well be back in Kuwait… Living in Baghdad, it's easy to see not just how badly the Americans and British have miscalculated, but it's also possible to imagine just how long President Saddam and his army and Ba'ath party militias can endure, a sobering thought for those of us sitting in the Iraqi capital and now only too well aware that the Stalingrad symbolism might turn out to be all too real."

■ **28 March:** Historians will debate when the tipping point of the war came. Some will mention the failure to defend the border, others the capture of Saddam International Airport. But most will probably conclude that the beginning of the end was signalled by Simon Jenkins, the *Times* columnist who makes even Mystic Mogg look far-sighted. In May 1999, a couple of weeks before Slobodan Milosevic's troops left Kosovo, he announced that a retreat by the Serbian army was "barely conceivable"; in October 2001, a month before the fall of Kabul, he warned that the bombing of Afghanistan "will probably freeze the Taliban in their hold on power". Lo and behold, his column in today's *Times* argues that "in Baghdad the coalition forces confront a city apparently determined on resistance. They should remember Napoleon in Moscow, Hitler in Stalingrad, the Americans in Mogadishu and the Russians in Grozny. Hostile cities… seldom capitulate, least of all when their backs are to the wall." His conclusion? "Baghdad will be near impossible to conquer." After that, even Saddam must realise that his fate is sealed. Still, at least Ross Benson has perked up a bit. "Hearing that I was down to a subsistence diet," he informs *Mail* readers, "an old acquaintance brought me a pot of roast chicken and rice his wife had specially cooked."

■ **29 March:** More good news from Ross Benson: "For the first time in over a week, I have managed to get a decent night's sleep." But there's more bad news for Saddam: he gets a tribute from Paul Routledge of the *Mirror* – the hack who insisted that Milosevic was "more popular with his people than ever" right up until his downfall, and promised that "the Taliban will still rule the roost in Kabul" a week before they scarpered. "The pace of the assault on Baghdad is slowing," Routledge reveals from his vantage point in London SW1. "Resistance appears to be stiffening, rather than weakening… Early on, Rumsfeld threatened that 'the days of Saddam Hussein are numbered'. He is still alive and apparently well… It is clear that [Rumsfeld] has massively miscalculated the strength and morale of Iraqi forces."

■ **30 March:** The *Observer* has an article by the London-based editor of *al Quds*, Abdel Bari Atwan. "Saddam has outfoxed his enemies," he assures us. "He has managed to surprise all in Washington, London and Arab capitals with his ability to absorb the strikes of the first days of confrontation, to turn the psychological war directed against him into a source of self-confidence, and to manipulate America's overwhelming military superiority in his favour… Saddam is betting on prolonging the war and on being aided both by weather and a shift in world opinion… Saddam sees his steadfastness as a victory and believes his chances of survival to have improved significantly since the beginning of the war." Meanwhile, Kevin Myers of the *Sunday Telegraph* comes over all apocalyptic. "No attacker in history has taken a defended city without fearful losses on both sides," he writes. "Leningrad and Stalingrad were defended with a savagery which Saddam has spent his entire life emulating, and neither fell. Nor did Sarajevo 10 years ago."

■ **1 April:** *Independent* readers are treated to a splendid April Fool from Robert Fisk. "So it's a 'truly remarkable achievement', is it?" he sneers. "General Tommy Franks says so. Everything is going 'according to plan', according to the British… So what's the plan? Are we going to forget Baghdad for a few months and wheel our young soldiers west to surround Damascus? Where, for heaven's sake, is all this going?… Even the 'siege of Baghdad' – a city that is 30 miles wide and might need a quarter of a million men to surround it – is fading from the diary."

■ **2 April:** Poor Ross Benson. "This is a three-dimensional war, but I am caught in a two-dimensional situation, forced to rely on the BBC World Service and the Iraqis for my information," he wails in the *Mail*. "I am utterly confused and unsure what to believe." No such problems for Simon Jenkins, however, who with no apparent irony chooses to write about… dud forecasts! "The Iraqi war is barely two weeks old and most of the predictions of politicians, generals and scribes are best left wrapping fish," he gloats. "The world was plainly told to get ready for a rerun of the Gulf War or Kosovo or Afghanistan. These templates were carefully preselected. Nobody in my hearing said prepare for Beirut, the West Bank or Stalingrad. Yet history warns strategists (and war ministers) to study defeats not victories."

■ **3 April:** The ubiquitous historian Correlli Barnett is also feeling vindicated. Seven months ago, he reminds *Daily Mail* readers, he wrote an article predicting that the Iraqi army certainly wouldn't offer an easy target to the USAF, but would fight a very protracted war indeed. "All this has come to pass. But if a civilian military historian like myself could get it right, how was it that the whole mammoth Pentagon professional apparatus could get it so wrong?" The answer lies in the arrogance of Washington hawks. "We now see the results of this technological arrogance. Instead of the expected non-stop, high-speed dash into Baghdad and despite briefings by spin doctors (in and out of uniform) about yesterday's advance on the city, American armoured spearheads are still not there yet… Instead (and just as in the case of the British under bombing in 1940-41 and the Germans in 1942-4), the bombardment appears to have stiffened the Iraqi resolve to fight… We see the deeply angered Iraqi people rallying behind Saddam in defence of their land against a foreign invader – just as in 1941, the Russian people rallied behind an even more awful tyrant, Josef Stalin, in resisting the Nazi invaders." But then Barnett has a big advantage over Messrs Bush and Rumsfeld: as he emphasises repeatedly, he is "a historian" who knows about these things.
As does the *Guardian*. "Common sense demands that what is being called the 'final push' on Baghdad should not be rushed," an editorial warns. "It would be irresponsible to assume that Baghdad will implode now that US troops are at its gates… The 20,000-strong Special Republican Guard, the special security organisation, the presidential bodyguard, the Saddam Fedayeen and the Ba'athist militia, reinforced by retreating and reserve Republican Guard units, comprise a potentially formidable, entrenched opposition."

■ **4 April:** Though still hopelessly bewildered, Ross Benson keeps *Daily Mail* readers informed: "The one thing I do know for certain is Saddam and his regime are not going to fade away and surrender Baghdad."

■ **5 April:** Can no one help Ross Benson escape the fog of war? "I have had no sighting of the defence minister or the vice-president for several days," he grumbles. "And despite yesterday's TV broadcast apparently showing Saddam going walkabout in Baghdad, no one really knows if it was him or a double. Is he wounded and perhaps dead? I have no way of knowing." For once, his Baghdad comrade Robert Fisk is equally bemused. "All day yesterday, I asked myself the same question: where was the supposed American assault on Baghdad?" he writes. "Yesterday the cafes were packed with soldiers from the Republican Guard divisions defending Baghdad, men who could drive only 15 minutes back from the front to eat between battles, their anti-aircraft guns and military vehicles parked outside. So where were the thousands of Guards whom the Americans could not find in the desert? They were here in Baghdad, defending their capital. Why, I wondered, should the Americans find that so surprising?"

■ **7 April:** The Americans push further into Baghdad in their quest to liberate Ross Benson. "I am looking out of my window," he reveals. "I want to see the Allied tanks." But Robert Fisk remains defiant: "The American mission, whatever its original intention, was a failure. Their tank column did not 'break into' the city as the Anglo-American headquarters originally stated. Iraqi resistance turned it back… So in military terms – and despite all the waffle from the Americans about the 'success' of the aborted US incursion – the Iraqis have so far held their ground in the Battle of Baghdad."

■ **8 April:** Ross Benson's long vigil is almost over. "Here I am," he reports excitedly, "standing witness to the death throes of the Saddam Hussein regime."

■ **9 April:** Today TV viewers around the world watch the toppling of Saddam's statue in central Baghdad – which must come as quite a surprise to those who also read Robert Fisk in the *Indepdendent* this morning. "Vast areas of Baghdad – astonishing when you consider the American claim to be 'in the heart' of the city – remain under Saddam Hussein's control," he reports.

■ **10 April:** Even while watching the historic scenes, Robert Fisk has the presence of mind to remember his ironic inverted commas. "The Americans 'liberated' Baghdad yesterday," his front-page despatch begins. But for once the Americans aren't the main culprits. "The mobs shrieked their delight," he notes scornfully. "Men who, for 25 years, had grovellingly obeyed Saddam's most humble secret policeman." He accuses these falafel-eating surrender-monkeys of "forgetting that the 'liberators' [are] a new and alien and all-powerful occupying force with neither culture nor language nor race nor religion to unite them with Iraq." Eventually, Fisk finds a small group of fighters firing their Kalashnikovs at American tanks on the other side of the waterway. "It was brave and utterly pathetic and painfully instructive," he observes. "For the men turned out to be Arabs from Algeria, Morocco, Syria, Jordan, Palestine. Not an Iraqi was among them. The Ba'athist militiamen, the Republican Guard, the greasy Iraqi intelligence men, the so-called Saddam Fedayeen had all left their posts and crept home." Instructive indeed. Fisk has spent weeks assuring us that the Iraqis will all lay down their lives in defence of Saddam, and what do they do? The ungrateful so-and-so's bastards tear down his statues. They've let themselves down; and, far worse, they've let Robert Fisk down.

■ **11 April:** The sceptics thought he would never concede defeat. But they were wrong: Simon Jenkins comes out with his hands up. "The American and British operation in Iraq has shown conclusively the power of a modern technological army," he writes. "Those, including myself, who feared another Dresden or Berlin… seem at best to be out of date." But even as angry mobs start tearing down statues of the once-revered columnist all over London, doubts set in: was this *really* written by Simon Jenkins – or one of his doubles?

IN THE TEAROOM

THE Easter recess arrived just in time to spare their blushes. No politician likes to look a complete chump and Labour's anti-war rebels, who only a few weeks ago were warning of a quarter of a million dead Iraqi civilians and another Vietnam, have had to slink around the corridors of Westminster dodging pointing fingers and mocking laughter from loyalists.

As for the cunning strategist who was supposed to lead their guerrilla campaign from the backbenchers – Robin Cook – like the smarter colonels in Saddam's republican guard, he's slipped into civvies and caught a bus home.

The rebels in the tearoom have been wondering aloud how Tony Blair will react. Would the PM show magnanimity in victory – or really rub their noses in it? And who will be among the political casualties of this war?

Unfair as it may seem – since he's been almost embarrassingly loyal and steadfast of late – John Prescott looks set to disappear from frontline politics before long. The only real point of the deputy prime minister for some time now has been his supposed utility as a bridge between the Blair regime and what remains of "old" Labour in the unions, the party and the northern heartlands. But Prescott has been thoroughly discredited among this constituency by his handling of the firefighters' dispute (though no one can be sure if this was culpably pisspoor handling on his part, or whether poor Prezza was set up by Number 10). In any case the backroom fixing can be done just as well in future by the new party chairman, Ian McCartney.

Prescott has, however, one last scene to act out in his role as fall-guy. Gordon Brown has had a good war. His discreet intervention kept Clare Short on board. Shielded by a barrage of smoke, he's succeeded in getting away with a tax-raising budget at a time of economic uncertainty. But when the full horror of the council tax increases sink-in, the public will want someone to kick, and kick hard. And with the euro decision looming, even the chancellor's worst enemies next door want to keep him safe from the angry mob. Besides, council tax isn't the treasury's business, is it?

The fact is that most people cannot for the life of them remember who is supposed to be in charge of local government these days. It used to be lumped in with environment – perhaps Margaret Beckett then? No, the town halls come under Prescott's pompous sounding "Office of the Deputy Prime Minister" where the hapless Nick Raynsford does the work but Prescott's supposed to take the flak. And you can bet... he will.

'Urquhart'

DEPUTY prime minister John Prescott's declaration that he had never heard of his cabinet colleague Lord Hunt when he resigned over the war with Iraq seemed incredible – but he doesn't seem to know who works in his own office either.

One *Eye* reader was so disgusted by Prescott's gaffe that he wrote to him at the Commons to complain. He received an acknowledgement, stating that the deputy prime minster had received so many letters on the subject he would be unable to reply personally. It was signed by one Emma Onono, "personal and political secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott MP."

Unsatisfied by this response, the irate voter phoned Mr Prescott's office to speak to Ms Onono – only to be told that she didn't work there and no one had heard of her. When pressed, one member of staff did recall Ms Onono, but told him that "she left months ago".

IRAQI LINKS

SENIOR politicians of all parties are nervously monitoring the attempted extradition of Iraqi tycoon Nadhmi Auchi, who was arrested in London recently in connection with a corruption trial in Paris involving the giant oil firm TotalFinaElf.

Now that Auchi's collar has been felt by Inspector Knacker and his passport confiscated, there could be some embarrassment for certain former ministers whom he has cultivated over the years. None more so than Lord Lamont, a director of Compagnie Internationale de Participations Bancaires et Financieres (CIPBF), the French-owned banking subsidiary of General Mediterranean Holding SA, the Iraqi's flagship company. As chief executive Auchi plays a key role in CIPBF which is involved in asset funding and international trading, notably in high-tech industries.

Auchi had valuable assets in Iraq which were frozen because of UN sanctions. And, by happy coincidence, Lamont raised the question of Iraqi sanctions in the Lords on 8 March 2001, soon after accepting the CIPBF directorship — though without declaring an interest. "I can easily imagine how a charge could be made against Britain and the United States in relation to sanctions against Iraq," he told fellow-peers. "I can easily imagine how that could be constructed into a charge of genocide. We are told that approximately half a million children are dying each year. I am not saying for one moment that I agree with that, but I can imagine how such charges could be brought." Although a lifting of sanctions would have benefited Auchi, Lord Lamont's tone was disinterested. "I have never visited Iraq and I have never had any business delaings with Iraq," he said.

One MP impressed by Lord Lamont's stance on sanctions was George Galloway, Member for Baghdad Central. The two forged an unlikely alliance and Lord Lamont was so enamoured by Gorgeous George that last year he tried to introduce him to Le Cercle, the secretive group of former intelligence officers and politicians which, according to former member Alan Clark, has been funded by the CIA. When Galloway's name was put forward, however, the Americans went ballistic and he was banned from attending. Undaunted, Galloway invited Lord Lamont to a reception at the Morocco Embassy last year which was also attended by Auchi, another member of Le Cercle.

Galloway, who used to be close to Auchi, has since fallen out with him. But Lord Lamont, like Lord Steel and former health minister Gerald Malone, continues to be on the payroll of this interesting tycoon, who was listed as the UK's seventh richest man in 2001 and now faces three counts of conspiracy to defraud.

What a pity no one warned Auchi about the Curse of Lamont! The former chancellor of the exchequer once pointed out that capitalism is as harsh with its failures as it successes, and his own business career shows how true this is: he was on the board of Taiwan Investment Trust, which went into liquidation; ECIT Finance, which went into liquidation; and Equity Consort and First Philippine Trust, which...you've guessed. Given that Lamont is also the chancellor who wasted £7bn in one day trying to fend off devaluation, Auchi may feel that he's got off comparatively lightly — so far...

BUDGET SPECIAL

THE *Eye* wishes to apologise for underestimating the enormous cock-up that has surrounded this month's introduction of Gordon Brown's new range of tax credits.

In the last issue we highlighted how overworked and ill-prepared Inland Revenue staff were struggling to meet the 7 April deadline and how, as a result, many needy families would not receive the money to which they are entitled and upon which they depend. We suggested that some might instead receive emergency payments to tide them over.

We were wrong. The chaos at the Inland Revenue was far worse than we suggested and automatic emergency payments are apparently a myth. Several readers have told us how their applications forms have simply gone missing, that there has been delay in sending out replacements – and even when families have sent in two, the Inland Revenue continues to bombard them with written or telephoned reminders.

The reason, it seems, is that one hand of the Inland Revenue does not know what the other is doing; that the team hired to remind the public to apply does not have access to a list showing those who have already submitted their claim. Said one reader who sent in his first application in relation to his disabled son back in October and a second in January after the first got lost: "What a huge waste of taxpayers' money. So far I have received no indication that I will get any payment – only a string of reminders to apply." When he asked if he would qualify for an emergency payment to help him survive, he was informed that no such scheme exists.

Another told how he tried to contact the author of an Inland Revenue letter to him seeking confirmation of correctly filled in details on his application form – only to be told he could not be put through because the office was in Peterlee, County Durham, and he was speaking to a call centre in the Midlands. The centre's instructions were to tell all callers irrespective of their query that they would hear from the Inland Revenue in the next few days. He hasn't.

Meanwhile staff at Jobcentres who also deal with benefits haven't been able to access the tax credit "view only" service "because of significant performance problems". So they too have been jamming the Inland Revenue's help lines. They get priority, but have found – just like claimants – that many on the helplines don't understand the system and have to go and get help. As one frontline worker told the *Eye*: "The trouble is compounded by the fact that we do not know what we are talking about either. The new tax credits are quite complicated, but we have only received a day's training... by people from our office who themselves only went on a day's training."

It seems some families did get their new tax credits after 7 April, but many more got neither their money nor an emergency payment. Some have been told they can apply for an emergency giro via their local revenue office. Er... except that requires filling in more forms.

'Backbiter'

Number crunching

£300m

■ amount government is setting aside to pay for child trusts each year

£3bn

■ amount government is setting aside to pay for war with Iraq this year

THE WAR ON TERROR

WHITHER the war on terror? And who stands to gain most from it? The membership and agenda of the influential US defence policy board gives some clues.

This is the hawkish committee that helps form President Bush's foreign policy and whose chairman, Richard Perle, had to resign because of conflicting business interests (see *Eyes passim*). To judge by leaked agendas seen by the *Eye*, the board appears to be pushing the US towards conflict with Iran and North Korea, and into substantially extending computerised surveillance. (Nine board members work for arms-making firms… or computer contractors!)

In the last few months US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld and deputy Paul Wolfowitz have both addressed the board twice. Pentagon officials Doug Fieth and John Bolton have also appeared. Feith is close to Rumsfeld and to Iraq's new overseer, retired US general Jay Garner; while Bolton recently warned that Syria was developing weapons of mass destruction, hinting it may be next in line for an attack.

The board also heard from Michael Ledeen of the American Enterprise Institute on "Iran issues". He believes that "we are at war whether we like it or not" with Iran, which he claims backs al-Qaeda. In addition the board had three separate discussions of "North Korea issues".

All this sabre-rattling must have been music to the ears of the arms firms on the board: men like Ronald R. Fogleman, who sits on the boards of Rolls Royce North America, the US subsidiary of the British aerospace giant, and on that of a joint venture between French arms maker Thales and cruise missile manufacturer Raytheon.

Other arms firms represented include Northrop Grumman, Boeing and TRW and Lockheed (through lobbyist Chris Williams). Bechtel vice-president Jack Sheehan, whose firm will win reconstruction contracts in Iraq, is a member too.

A persistent theme of discussions has been America's obsession with computerised surveillance. The board heard an hour-long presentation on "Total Information Awareness" – the Pentagon's plan to monitor everyone, everywhere, all the time. This followed a discussion of "Bandwidth and Network Centric Efforts" in warfare. Several board members have interests in this area.

Perle is on the board of Autonomy Corporation, a firm selling "war on terror" software to America's homeland security office and to British police forces. And board member James Woolsey, a former head of the CIA currently tipped to head Iraq's new "ministry of information", is a vice-president of consultant Booz Allen Hamilton. This firm wins millions of dollars in computing contracts with the US army.

Woolsey, who recently told the *Guardian* America is involved in "world war four", is also on the board of the Paladin Capital Group, an investment firm fishing for war on terror opportunities.

PRIVATISATION

THE government is extending privatisation into the one area taxpayers might have expected to remain in state hands: that of state secrets.

A public private partnership (PPP) deal will see the closure of the government's secure file-storage centre in Hayes, west London, currently home to 200 kilometres of documents from the ministry of defence and 13 other bodies including the Metropolitan police, the crown prosecution service and the court service.

Under the £34m, 25-year contract, the files are to be looked after by delivery company TNT who will ship the records to Northamptonshire and stick them on computer. The company then plans to offer "flexible delivery arrangements" to allow departments to access their records when needed. As part of the deal, US property developer ProLogis becomes the new owner of the valuable site at Hayes.

Once owned by Rupert Murdoch and used to cart copies of the *Sun* around the country during the Wapping dispute, TNT is now owned by Dutch firm TPG.

The next deal on the cards is file-storage for the department of work and pensions. More than 900 civil servants currently look after benefits records at 40 locations nationwide. Teeside MP Frank Cook has laid down an early-day motion protesting at the plans to privatise such sensitive and often personal data. He told the *Eye* that some DWP information is already stored by private firms who make the department pay a fee every time they want to access files. "Plus it takes about two months to get the file sometimes," added Mr Cook. "Here on Teeside the local records office can lay their hands on a file within 24 hours."

If state secrets can be flogged to the private sector, what can't be?

MORE than 600 former ministry of defence staff who crew the Royal Navy's tug boats are to be employed on contracts issued in Guernsey in another privatisation tax avoidance scam.

By transferring the contracts for staff of the privatised Warship Support Agency (WSA) offshore, Serco subsidiary Serco Denholm can legally duck out of paying national insurance contributions and other taxes.

The staff are based in the ports of Portsmouth, Devonport, Greenock and Faslane and operate the various barges and tugs that serve the warships. The Transport and General Workers' Union says the move would save the company (and cost the treasury) £1.8m a year in tax and NI contributions; but its workers, it says, do not want to become "tax exiles" and certainly don't want to lose UK employment rights.

The workers have lobbied parliament and the union is still negotiating with Serco in the hope of an unlikely change of heart. The WSA was privatised in 1996 (its contract is up for grabs again in 2005) providing another example of questionable value for taxpayers.

EDUCATION

THE continuing shortage of school examiners has already led to emergency plans to allow teachers to take 10 days off school to mark A level and GCSE scripts. Ministers will apparently make funds available to take on supply teachers to cover for them.

Teachers, already overworked, aren't keen on the idea; and there is in any case a shortage of good supply teachers. So when this year's round of school examination cock-ups occur — as they will — the government will only have itself to blame.

Moreover, red tape means that well-qualified examiners are being rejected on ludicrous grounds. Martyn Roper, for example, had been a teacher for 27 years when a serious heart attack forced him to take early retirement. A maths specialist and science co-ordinator, Mr Roper last year marked Key Stage 3 science papers. It enabled him to use his skills, continue to be involved in education and did not put his health at risk.

This year, however, he was told his expertise was not required. Why? Because he receives a pension on health grounds, he is not allowed to take on any work — no matter how little — that "brings him into contact with children or schools". Even though marking a few dozen papers at home does *not* bring him into contact with children or schools (as a script marker, he should not have any such contact), the department for education and skills, the examination boards and Teachers Pensions, which runs the pension scheme, have all given him the thumbs down.

Last year he earned the grand sum of £850 for marking papers over the summer — hardly a case of taking a pension while being fit for full-time work. He is highly experienced, well qualified and, unlike working teachers, has plenty of time to mark papers with care. Nor is he alone, it seems.

"Surprise!"

DOWN ON THE FARM

WHEN there were still MPs with expert knowledge of farming, the Commons "agriculture committee" had a certain prestige. Shrunk by today's anti-farming ethos into something called the environment, food and rural affairs committee, it has just produced a report on the Rural Payments Agency.

This is the body which employs 3,000 officials to dole out subsidy cheques to farmers under the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP), the system whereby UK taxpayers send £5bn a year to Brussels, which then hands back £2.5bn for UK farmers, while the rest is kept for worthier recipients such as the owners of non-existent Italian olive groves.

The MPs' report demonstrates how any "subsidy culture" demoralises everyone involved. The officials deeply resent having to hand over piles of other people's cash to undeserving farmers, so they make life as hard as possible for the recipients by forcing them to wade through stacks of incomprehensible paperwork. If they catch a farmer getting one digit wrong on an 11-character cattle tag, or miscalculating the size of a 12-acre field by a fraction of a hectare, or sending in his 80-page form a day late, he can be penalised by losing all his subsidies. But for the officials themselves a different standard applies. They are allowed to preside over a sea of administrative chaos, knowing the only comeback will be another massive fine in euros imposed by Brussels and paid by the UK taxpayer.

Head of the agency is Johnston McNeill, who formerly ran the notorious Meat Hygiene Service, enforcing EU meat directives on Britain's fast-disappearing abattoirs. He told the MPs how his agency's "mission statement" is "to be a customer-focused organisation that pays valid CAP claims accurately and on time", when all evidence suggests this is the joke of the century.

MPs heard how 100,000 claims for payment were still "awaiting approval" after five months, and how nearly a fifth of claims under one programme were paid so late they missed even the most generous deadline set by the EU. This left farmers trying to keep bank managers at bay with promises that "the ministry cheque really is in the post", while Brussels imposed yet another £14m fine, for which, as usual, the tab was picked up by the taxpayer. The biggest shambles, the MPs were told, related to a breakdown in the computer system intended to relate cattle movements recorded under the "cattle passport system" with subsidy claims made by farmers. Defra's evidence naturally tried to lay all blame on the farmers for not giving accurate information. But even Mr McNeill, under questioning, admitted that "on reflection, this was more an administrative error on our part than the fault of the farmers".

'Muckspreader'

FTVE

War Coverage (all channels)

THE end of a war is no time for gloating. But this column would gently and humbly like to whisper that the complaints made by Remote Controller a fortnight ago have been vindicated and amplified by the conclusion of television hostilities.

It's now quite clear, for example, that – for all the early glee about what an "open" war this was in comparison with others – the first real 24-hour live-on-television war was a victory for technology but a terrible failure for journalism.

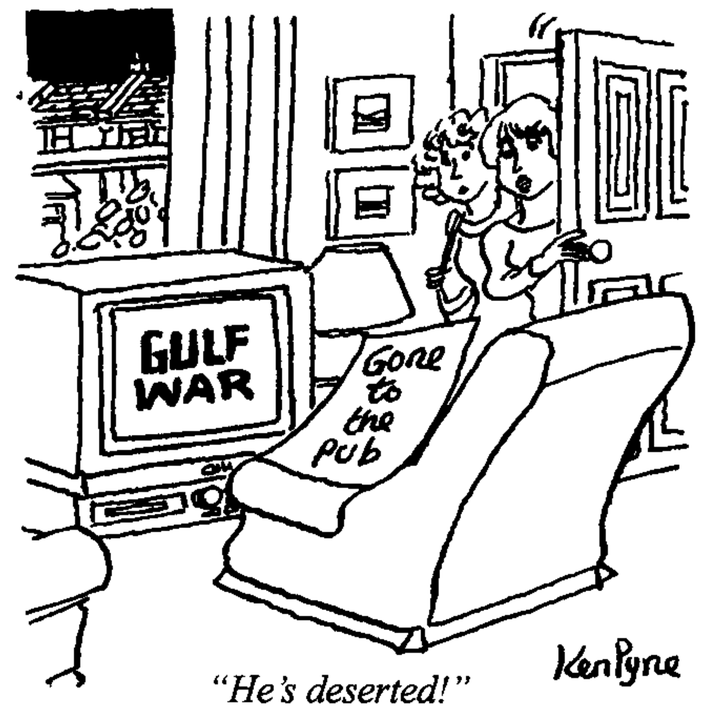
There were two main phases in the coverage. In the initial skirmishes, the impression was given by television that everything was going brilliantly and that the whole thing would be over in days. After 10 days, the reporting reversed to the version that the entire fight had been badly planned and that coalition forces would be bogged down outside Baghdad for months or even years in some nightmare combination of Stalingrad and Vietnam.

Unfortunately, Baghdad actually fell within days of this becoming the standard version. For the viewer, the war coverage increasingly resembled a televised football match in which the commentator kept giving out the wrong score. The suits will say that it's virtually impossible to know what's really going on in a war, which is fine. But, surely if you don't know what the story is, you shouldn't be trying to report it for 24 hours a day.

And, in communicating the few facts they had, all the main news channels were guilty of getting the tone wrong. While no British network was as tacky as the Americans – where, even on news bulletins, the names of dead soldiers were read against an anthem sound-track – Sky News and ITN both tended to be too gung-ho, treating the whole thing as a war movie.

The BBC, by contrast, was too no-no. The last few days saw the hilarious spectacle of some of its big names – Nicholas Witchell in Quatar and Rageh Omaar in Baghdad – having to switch overnight from Lord Haw-Haw to Lord Kitchener mode, as the eventual ease of the victory became clear. Omaar, in particular, glided within hours from an emphasis on the impregnability of Baghdad and the high confidence of the regime to references to the inevitable progress of the Americans.

At least the reporters were actually there or, at least, somewhere. The worst aspect of the war coverage was the reverence given on all the rolling networks to public emails and texts. We're happy enough to hear if Ronnie from Rotherham is for or against the war but, even in these egalitarian times, is Ronnie really in a position to know if General Tommy Franks has botched his battle-plan and underestimated the strength of the Republican Guard? Too often, public access television consists of half-digested newspapers being spewed back into the studio.



"He's deserted!"

So, in 15 years' time, when President Jeb Bush or whoever invades Brussels or wherever, it's clear what the rules of engagement should be: less live reporting, less presentational ego, less public participation. If this was what "open" war reporting brings, let's give "closed" another go.

Journalists are often accused of a hit-and-run mentality, speeding from the scene of the crime as soon as the main impact has taken place. To counter this, most networks made a show of continuing with special programming several days after the fall of Baghdad, even though you could increasingly feel the gameshows, police series and documentaries about Les and Amanda panting impatiently behind them.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

WHEN the original plans for BBC3 were announced, commercial competitors objected on the grounds that they would duplicate too much of their own pisspoor output.

Culture secretary Tessa Jowell agreed and forced a rethink at White City; and "strict conditions" were attached to the BBC's new bid for a licence: guaranteed levels of news and current affairs, original programming, etc.

So what does a typical BBC3 Saturday schedule look like? Er, Comic Relief Does Fame Academy, a BBC 1 idea; *Liquid Assets*, an offshoot from BBC Choice; *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps* and *They Think It's All Over*, neither of them original; *Celebdaq*, the first original thought of the day (but it's all about celebrities); *Britain's Closest Encounter: Rendlesham*, a "current affairs documentary" about UFOs of the sort endlessly featured by commercial competitors like Sky One; something called *Prams, Parenting And Partying*; and *This Is Dom Jolly*, a disastrous show case for the former Channel Four star.

Fact: BBC3 costs £93m.

"A VERY cynical plan motivated by sheer greed." So said millionaire Chris Tarrant of the cheating major.

Now Celador, which made £30m from *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* in 2000, and Granada TV, whose chief executive Charles Allen faced accusations of greed from angry shareholders who thought his £2m payout despite the ITV Digital fiasco a touch self-indulgent, have revealed a cynical plan of their own.

The well-salaried Martin Bashir and an entire "investigation team" will present a *Tonight with Trevor McDonald Special*, which will exploit all this free publicity to the full, boosting ratings and advertising revenue. Trebles all round.

Fritz Spiegl
1926-2003

FRITZ SPIEGL was one of Private Eye's first outside contributors. A newspaper cutting, "No water, so firemen improvised" appeared under his byline "Fritz's Spiegls" in 1962. The byline lapsed but the tradition has continued.

His vast knowledge of music and the world of orchestras was a valuable source of material for many moons of *Music and Musicians*. He will be sadly missed.

DUMB BRITAIN

BBC Radio Newcastle

Paul Wappat: How long did the Six Day War between Egypt and Israel last?

Contestant (*after long pause*): Fourteen days.

Virgin Radio

Daryl Denham: In which country would you spend shekels?

Contestant: Holland?

Denham: Try the next letter of the alphabet.

Contestant: Iceland? Ireland?

Denham (*helpfully*): It's a bad line. Did you say Israel?

Contestant: No.

CELEBRITY DUMB BRITAIN

In Our Time, Radio 4

Cosmologist: ...and eventually the star becomes a red giant, or, if it's a really massive star, a super red giant.

Melvyn Bragg: Is it called "red" because of the colour?

Cosmologist: Erm, yes.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

"HOBO-CHIC"- CELEBRITIES ARE DRESSING LIKE TRAMPS....
GOSH, D'YOU EVER GET MISTAKEN FOR BEING ONE OF THOSE SAD, UNFORTUNATE PEOPLE?
CELEBRITY TOSH
NAH- PEOPLE KNOW I'M REALLY A TRAMP!
CELEBRITY TOSH
Hungry + Homeless

O·B·N

... Like loitering in the vortex of a recurring supernova as the energy saturates the collective consciousness, gets recycled back to us and mutates into the next wave exchange...

RUSTY ANDERSON
(on working with Paul McCartney – sleeve note to 'Back in the US')

Submitted by Nick Hirst.

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

Rolling News

"For the Iraqis, it must be like seeing Martians arriving from the moon."
(Rageh Omaar, BBC Baghdad correspondent, describing the arrival of US troops.)

BBC bosses were so delighted with their view of the statue of Saddam being toppled in Baghdad that they instantly cleared almost all their schedules — "we're now joined by viewers from BBC World, BBC One and Five Live radio", the News 24 anchor breathlessly announced.

Unfortunately the statue's stubborn refusal to fall for a further two hours, despite reporter Rageh Omaar's frequent assurances that it was "toppling on the brink", left them with rather a lot of dead airtime to fill.

"We can't really hear you, Rageh, but we'd like you to go on describing what's happening," came the plaintive request at one point.

ON 10 April, Sky News, Channel Four's Julian Rush and ITN's Julian Manyon all had near identical reports featuring a statue being demolished near Kirkuk on the second day of statue destruction in Iraq.

Manyon, alas, was slow off the mark and had to make a bizarre on-air apology: "Unfortunately the crowds were not able to wait for the lunchtime news and they have pulled it down altogether," he explained over sad pictures of an empty plinth.

"Wait! We now have a picture of it!" says Nicholas Owen in the studio. Up came pictures of a completely different statue being demolished in Baghdad the day before.

WITH so many separate feeds coming into news rooms — BBC News 24 boasts in *Ariel* of 40 different sources of information — there's no longer enough time for experienced news editors to judge what should make it to air.

The BBC let slip that information comes into News 24 so fast now that it is left to technicians, not journalists, to decide what goes on screen with the advice of a picture producer.

This may explain why it takes so long to make sense of conflicting breaking stories.

FOOTAGE of an elderly Iraqi beating a portrait of Saddam Hussein with his shoe was shown over and over again by the BBC on the day that US forces took control of Baghdad, along with the observation that it was "one of the biggest insults in this part of the world."

The subsequent insult — another man entered the shot, hitched up his robes and rubbed his genitals against the dictator's face — was unaccountably dropped from later bulletins, though it was broadcast in full live on News 24 before a swift cut back to the studio.

SOME journalists covering the war have taken to wearing the letters "TV" or "PRESS", made of tape and stuck prominently on their flak jackets, in the naive belief it will lessen their chances of being killed accidentally by American troops.

Rageh Omaar went one further and now sports a small "BBC News" logo on his chest plate. It's far too small to be seen by trigger-happy marines, but the Beeb's marketing department is delighted to see the BBC "brand" splashed across pooled footage.

Competitors can and do cover up a rival's logo if it sits in the corner of the screen, but they can do nothing if the correspondent is wearing it.

OF COURSE the BBC has war insurance for its front-line correspondents and their equipment, and pays handsome premiums for it. But paperwork doesn't always survive battlefield conditions, as the finance department discovered last week after John Simpson's close encounter with American friendly fire in northern Iraq.

An email to corporation boxwallahs from Chris Grout, the "business and resources manager" for BBC Newsgathering, broke the sad news. "It is clear to me that because of the absence of any proper documentation we will not be successful in getting any insurance income from the loss of one vehicle and damage to others. We plan to replace the vehicles as necessary and will not have a real cost for some time. I suggest you allow a sum of $60k as a contingency. No other loss of major equipment just some ancillaries so another $5k as worst-case scenario."

Well, jeeps can always be replaced. But there's no mention of the question which some hacks are now asking: what of the BBC translator killed in the incident? Did he have "proper documentation"? If not, the boxwallahs could find themselves shelling out rather more than $60k.

"What exactly did Saddam Hussein say and why didn't he say it?
(Jon Snow, *Channel 4 News*.)

THE plight of the 24-hour broadcasters, trying to keep going on the subject of "the war" without hesitation, deviation or repetition, has been particularly desperate at Radio Five Live, which can't even seek refuge in pictures of tanks.

Conscious that virtually every angle had been exhausted, its producers came up with a brilliant idea: get the kiddies' viewpoint.

"So," presenter Fi Glover asked a caller, "what effect has the war had on your four-year-old daughter?"

"Absolutely nothing," came the reply. "She doesn't know a thing about it."

ON 8 April Sky News startled some viewers by reporting "fierce fighting on the banks of the Tiber". Whether this meant that George Bush had already crossed the Rubicon was not, alas, disclosed.

A BBC1 News special on the morning of 9 April had two sub-titled headlines: "British troops are trying to control widespread looting in Basra", and "Kofi Annan has postponed meeting with Tony Blair over reconstruction of Iraq".

Well, that's what they should have said. In the excitement of the moment, what appeared on screen instead was far more interesting: "British troops are trying to control Tony Blair over plans to reconstruct Iraq."

ON 20 March live footage was shown on the *Six O'clock News* of the bombardment of Baghdad, with no soundtrack. When it was replayed later in the programme, however, the sound of explosions could clearly be heard. Oddly, while the footage was filmed from a position several miles away, the explosions could be seen and heard simultaneously, contrary to the basic laws of physics.

Video engineer Brian Jackson, who was watching the programme, also realised from the tone of the explosions that they were recorded at close quarters, and immediately phoned the BBC to complain that they were adding sound effects to their news coverage.

In return he received the following reply from Marcus Foreman, a member of the editorial and investigation team. "While live news footage would have shown the images of the explosions prior to any sound because the material was filmed at a distance, in a pre-recorded report such as this one, we are able to sync the images and sound together. The BBC doesn't feel there is anything untoward in this practice as the actual sound is still being used in the reports."

SPLIT personalities
Bob Moore

Chemical Ali G

"It [Basra] is a large city of some 2.3 people.
(Nicholas Witchell, BBC News.)

Warballs

"A cat charity [in North London] says fewer people are taking in homeless cats — and they're blaming it on the war in Iraq and congestion charging."

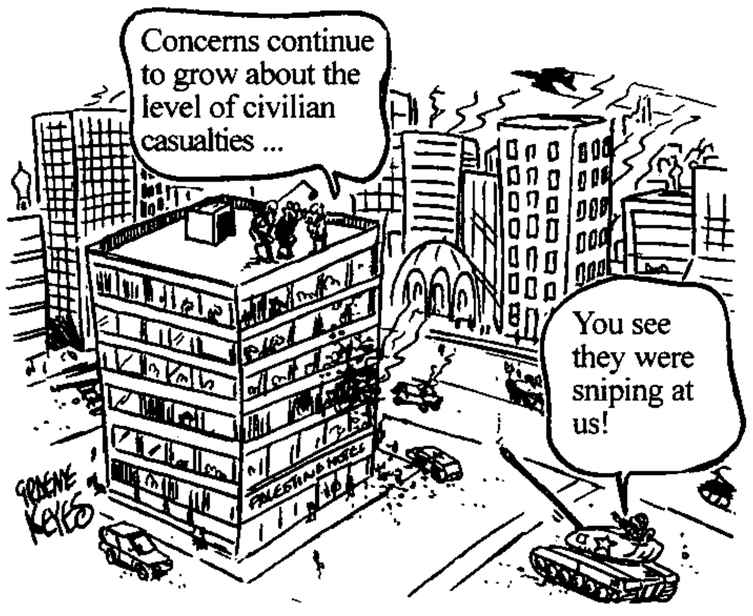
— Wood Green *Weekly Herald*.

"Thankfully, it now looks as though the war in Iraq is all over bar the shouting. To celebrate this, GYC has decided to make it even easier to book your yacht charter holiday."

— Mailing from Global Yacht Charters.

"'People are dressing up more now because the idea of war hangs heavy in the air,' says New York drag chanteuse and long-time club-goer Joey Arias. 'It is something that makes you think that "I'd better do the best I can".'"

— Gay lifestyle magazine *Boyz*.



SIGNAL FAILURES

Operation Cuckoo

WHEN strategic rail authority (SRA) boss Richard Bowker co-chaired Virgin Trains he was involved in Operation Princess, Richard Branson's catchphrase for turning the "Cinderella" Cross-country network into, er, a princess. The operation was a calamity for passengers, causing huge delays and overcrowding; so Bowker is implementing what Branson should brand Operation Cuckoo – evicting anything that gets in Virgin's way.

Virgin's chaotic doubling last autumn of Cross-country services over Birmingham's already crowded railways was a typical product of the Tories' uncoordinated railway. Now we have the SRA to reassert central control, and Bowker has used his power to order withdrawal of some of Cross-country's trains from the fringes but bolster its services through the lucrative Birmingham area.

Something has to give; but if Virgin reverts to longer trains at the old frequencies, its share of the fares income will plummet (income is dished out according to the number of trains run by each operator). So out go First North Western's trains on Virgin's money-spinning Manchester-Birmingham corridor. And Central Trains' hourly service from Matlock to Birmingham will be truncated next month to Derby and run only two-hourly.

With his Virgin-tinted spectacles, Bowker hasn't realised frequent services are more significant to passengers on local journeys than to those travelling hundreds of miles on book-ahead tickets.

Operation Cuckoo is spreading to the west-coast mainline where Virgin again wants to run shorter but more frequent trains, thereby hogging more of the route's limited slots. The SRA is going to great lengths to protect Virgin's official monopoly on chunks of the country's busiest line. Next month Midland Mainline will start an alternative London-Manchester service and the SRA will ensure Virgin doesn't lose any revenue to what was once known as "competition".

Bowker is stripping out other operators to give Virgin an even bigger slice of the cake. Silverlink's alternative London-Birmingham service is to cease. Most of the SRA's cuts are ostensibly because of a shortage of track capacity, but that doesn't apply to the Carlisle-Glasgow direct line, where Arriva must stop taking revenue from Virgin. Arriva's Leeds-Glasgow train would be far from its base and hard to repair if it broke down in Scotland, says the SRA, ignoring Scotrail's use of the same design.

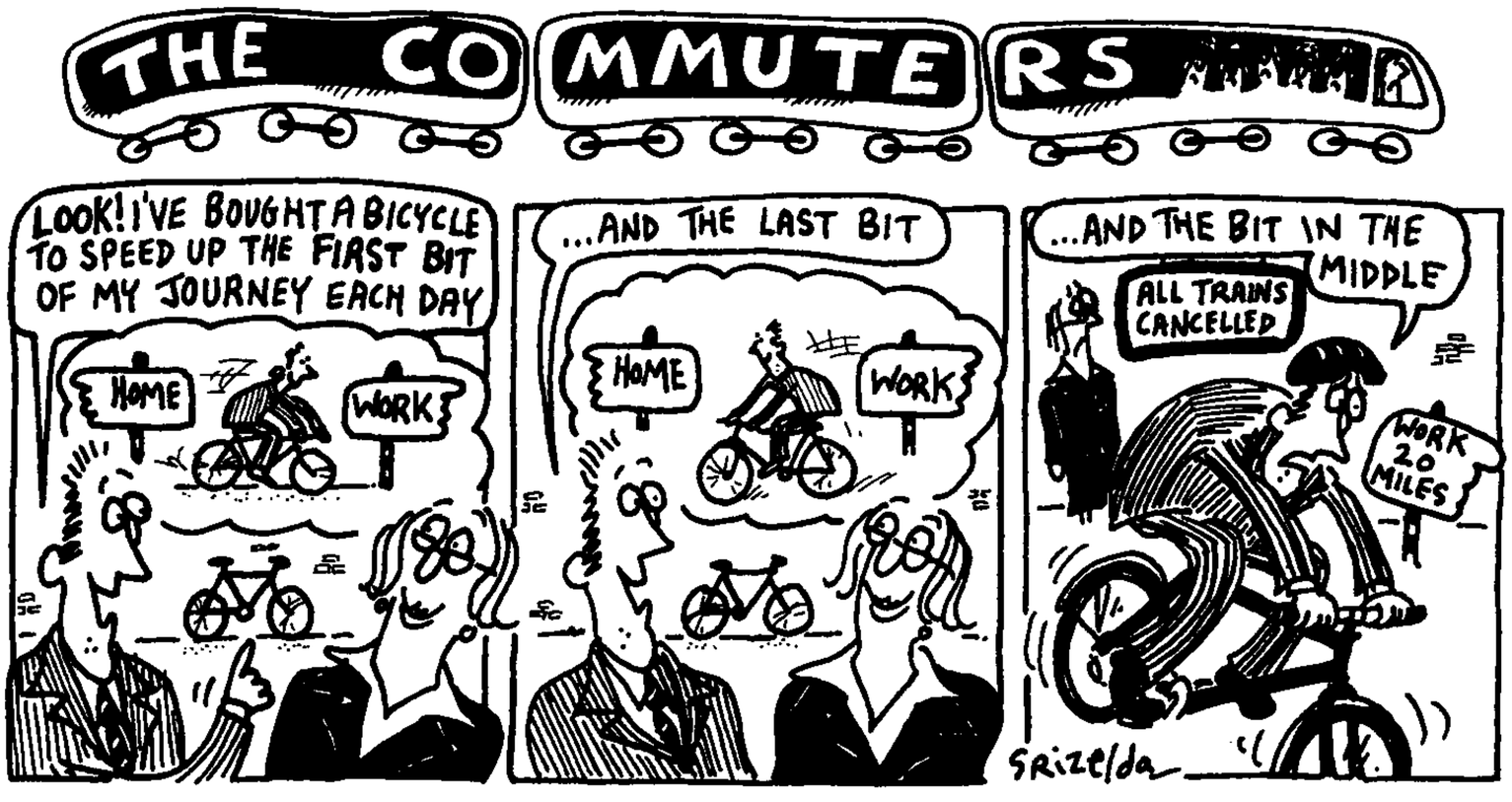
The east-coast mainline, from King's Cross, has similar congestion to the west-coast but there's no presumption everything is secondary to the intercity operator, GNER in this case. Far from weeding out rival services, the SRA allowed a new company to run Hull-London trains. While Virgin pursued its policy of shrinking trains, GNER increased seats by lengthening trains and hiring 14-carriage Eurostars.

The financial consequences of Bowker's Virgin-first policy are damaging the rest of the railway. Last summer he awarded Virgin an extra £106m subsidy to the end of March. The SRA has said nothing about the hefty bailout it must be giving Virgin this financial year, nor has it published any evaluation of other operators, including the SRA, running the franchises instead.

Virgin's west-coast promises were based on a £2bn infrastructure upgrade. The bill rose to about £13bn but the SRA insists much of the work must be carried out. It has now decided Rugby station, recently tarted up at a cost of £8m, will be demolished and rebuilt around new tracks so Virgin can run through at 125mph. With so much public cash thrown after Branson's dream there's none left to upgrade the east-coast and Great Western mainlines.

●*EYE* 1075 reported how SRA media director Ceri Evans responded to a critical article in *Rail Professional* magazine by cancelling an interview with Bowker and leaving offensive and defamatory phone messages. In case SRA staff were puzzled by such petulance, Bowker sent an internal email explaining that the communications team at the SRA is ensuring that "when external parties attack what we do, the record is put straight". Far from being embarrassed by Evans' behaviour, Bowker wrote: "We are going to continue to do the right thing."

'Dr B. Ching'



DOING THE ROUNDS

What a Hunt

"SOME targets are essential... But we set far too many and the beleaguered NHS is suffering under the weight of it all." So says Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, with all the confidence of a junior health minister who's just resigned.

Hunt has had an active resignation thus far, having also taken a swipe at the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) for failing to recruit sufficiently senior managers for its review teams. "If you are reviewing a large acute teaching trust, you need someone who is chief executive of a similar organisation."

This prompted a defensive paddy from Peter Homa, chief executive of CHI. "It is ironic that Lord Hunt should express his regret at CHI's failure to recruit sufficiently senior reviewers... We expressed the same concerns to Lord Hunt on several occasions." Even more ironic, CHI is charged with cutting through the buck-passing and getting to the root of the NHS's problems. In October 2001 its review of Ashford and St Peter's NHS trust praised the "excellent, comprehensive and robust" risk management processes. Two years later, public concern over deaths in the maternity unit forced CHI back to the trust, where it discovered half the number of recommended permanent midwives and poor relationships with consultants posing "a risk to the quality of patient care".

Alas, CHI didn't assess maternity services on its previous visit, despite concerns raised to it by North West Surrey community health council. But as CHI's nursing director Liz Fradd put it: "We are definitely not embarrassed." So that's all right then.

Community health councils have a track record of raising concerns and embarrassing the government, but Lord Hunt saw them off too: "I bear the scars of the two year battle to get rid of CHCs. They certainly put up a spirited fight." Whether the plethora of Labour's "patient forums", all beholden to the NHS brotherhood, will put up a similar fight on behalf of patients remains to be seen.

Hunt resigned over the war, not the NHS, but his reflections recognise that government reforms are destined to fail unless they win over the hearts and minds of the staff. The fact that consultants have overwhelmingly rejected their new contract and GPs look set to follow suit are not good omens; and neither is a ballot at this week's Unison conference calling for a rejection of Labour's "Agenda for Change".

A conference aiming to unite doctors and managers organised by the NHS confederation and the royal colleges earlier this month found that many doctors are unhappy and unwilling to implement the government's "aggressive and unsophisticated attitude to health reform", and so make life as hard as possible for middle managers. None of this bodes well for the extra billions being ploughed into the NHS.

Labour, saddled with Tony Blair's absurd promise to "turn round the NHS by the time of the next election, or judge me on that", has to produce something on paper to show the NHS has been saved. The staff just have to treat patients without the capacity to do it properly. As one orthopaedic surgeon put it: "We are deeply in the mire. Having bust a gut to hit a 12-month inpatient wait target by the end of March, we now have a huge backlog of urgent cases who have been disadvantaged."

Another complains that "the Saturday blitz to clear non-urgent waiting lists has meant old ladies with fractured femurs sitting on the wards. The more their surgery is delayed, the sicker they get. Mortality in this group has gone up 30 percent, and those that survive are staying longer, blocking beds for elective cases." Hunt is right: too many targets are bad for patients. Shame he didn't say so loudly while in office.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

I WANT TO SEE SOMEONE ABOUT MY EYES
RECEPTION
HMM...
CAN YOU SEE THE GREEN DOOR AT THE END OF THAT CORRIDOR MARKED 'OPHTHALMOLOGIST'?
YES
THEN YOU DON'T NEED HIM.
NEXT

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

BULLY FOR NORTHANTS

THE vindictiveness of the council and judiciary in East Northamptonshire against publican Geoff Monks (*Eyes passim*) has hit new heights.

Last week Kettering magistrates ordered him to be sent to prison to complete a four-month sentence for non-payment of fines in the full knowledge that he suffers from two serious heart conditions which could kill him.

Back in 1999 Monks was hit with unprecedented fines and costs totalling £27,500 after the local district council brought food safety charges against him at his pub, the Snooty Fox, at Lowick, near Kettering, following a complaint by local solicitor Jenny Lawrence, who claimed she had become ill after eating a meal there.

Lawrence, a "flamboyant" character with a reputation for having a foul temper and an overbearing manner, was furious with Monks because she had been barred from the pub after making a scene over a minor mistake in her bill. More than a year later, after Monks's prosecution, Lawrence boasted to fellow guests at a dinner party of her close friendships with a senior figure on east Northants council and with local magistrates (see Letters, last *Eye*).

On 5 December last year Kettering magistrates sentenced Monks, who has a history of heart trouble, to four months in prison for non-payment of his excessive fine. (He was unable to pay because his business had been ruined by the publicity surrounding the case, but no means inquiry was ever carried out.) After being handcuffed and taken to a police cell, Monks suffered an attack of supraventricular tachycardia, a stress-induced condition in which the upper two chambers of the heart beat too quickly. He also has atrial fibrillation, which means that the upper chambers do not contract quickly enough to fill the main pump of the heart, the ventricles. He spent two weeks in intensive care at Kettering general hospital before being allowed home. Police told him to present himself to them again for completion of his sentence when he was fit.

In a report written on 24 February this year Monks's GP warned: "These are serious problems and in certain circumstances may prove fatal... Geoff is fully aware of the potentially fatal consequences of his cardiac status, which tends to exacerbate the situation. It is my opinion that a court appearance... would [place] an unnecessary strain on an already damaged vital organ." Monks was clearly not fit, so he stayed at home, in the full knowledge of the police.

Last Wednesday, however, police took Monks, whose only crime (which he denies) was allegedly to have had a piece of mouldy ham in his fridge, to notorious Woodhill prison at Milton Keynes — a high-security jail which houses some of Britain's most dangerous criminals. As the *Eye* goes to press his lawyers are seeking an urgent judicial review to have him released on medical grounds. Friends of Geoff Monks have set up a website about the case: www.lowickone.co.uk

PIER PRESSURE

ANOTHER Brighton landmark, the derelict West Pier, has been destroyed in a probable arson attack, months before restoration work and a controversial accompanying development on the seafront was due to begin.

The fire was in a detached part of the pier inaccessible from the seafront, so it is unlikely to have been started by vandals or drunks.

But there are plenty of other people with an interest in seeing the pier destroyed. Indeed, one Brighton resident has written to the *Eye* with a helpful list. Yet the authorities seem curiously reluctant to investigate. The fire brigade says the structure is too dangerous to send in a team, while council leader Ben Codfish shrugs his shoulders and says: "It is very unlikely we will ever find out who was responsible, so I can see little point."

HORLEY TOWN COUNCIL
The people of Horley are incited to attend the
HORLEY TOWN MEETING
Horley Life

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

COLIN SHEARSMITH, chief executive of Durham city council, plans to retire after the May elections. With questions piling up over his handling of the council's disastrous Millennium City development (*Eyes passim*), his departure looks well timed.

One of the most embarrassing debacles was the collapse last May of the Entertainment Team (Durham) Ltd (ETDL), the management company hired by the council to run the scheme's flagship Gala Theatre, with debts of some £750,000 to 160 creditors. The loss-making venue is currently being kept afloat by council taxpayers to the tune of £500,000 a year (a sale would mean the forced repayment of £14m to the Millennium Commission).

ETDL went belly up just two weeks after the Gala's official opening by the Queen and less than four months after it opened for business with a spectacularly loss-making concert by the boy band Westlife. The 550-seat theatre got off to the worst possible start, losing at least £100,000 on the opening night, after paying Westlife £70,000 for a 20-minute gig. As two-thirds of the audience consisted of freeloading councillors and other "guests", there was never the slightest prospect of recouping any money. The fact that the restaurant and bar weren't ready meant there was hardly any cashflow.

After ETDL's collapse, Shearsmith was quick to blame the fiasco on the firm's directors. But the chief executive knew that ETDL was in the shit – not least because he was partly responsible for putting it there.

With the theatre project running way over budget, Shearsmith was reluctant to go to council members for more cash. So he persuaded ETDL to take £60,000 of its annual management fee up-front to help pay for the opening night, with the promise that the money could be recouped from monthly takings which never materialised. He also, claim ETDL's former directors, persuaded them to give personal guarantees for bank loans, which they naively did, with the result that they have both since been declared bankrupt. Other capital costs that should have been met by council tenders, such as fitting out the bar, were taken on by ETDL on the promise that the council would come up with the money. It never did.

Worried business ratepayers in Durham recently had a meeting with Shearsmith and council leader Maurice Crathorne to express concern. Peter Jackson, chairman of the city's chamber of trade, asked why the council had loaned ETDL £75,000 shortly before the collapse. "I was misled, simple as that," said Crathorne – although he did not say by whom. Surely the police should be called in to investigate whether any fraud had taken place, said Jackson. The chief executive, who was himself the subject of a fraud squad investigation over a land deal in 1999 (the CPS decided there was insufficient evidence to prosecute) did not think this was a good idea. "The police are useless at this sort of investigation," he said.

● WEST Yorkshire police are investigating how drug dealers and gun runners in Leeds "rented" council houses to store guns and crack cocaine. Two housing managers have been arrested and suspended while a third awaits an internal disciplinary hearing.

The 453 homeless people in Leeds waiting for a council property are keen to know how long the alleged fraud had been going on — and why it took Insp Knacker to uncover it when the council employs its own anti-fraud team whose job it is to prevent, er, exactly this sort of thing.

SPA HUMBUG

BATH and North-East Somerset Council (Banes) is embarrassed that its £27m millennium project, the Bath Spa (*Eyes passim*), is now nearly three years overdue while costing council taxpayers £30,000 a week. But at least all is well according to the glossy magazine, *Spa,* published with the "support" of Banes and Thermae, the Spa's operating company, to coincide with the latest missed opening date.

In the mag Carol and Jerry Walsingham, a local business couple, review a day at the "newly-opened" Spa. Jerry has an Indian head massage and a Vichy shower; Carol has a mud bath and joins a Pilates class. They lunch on locally-farmed chicken and organic salad. But the Spa isn't only for trendy tosspots like Carol and Jerry — they recognise "a small group of rugby players enjoying the thermal waters". The only problem is that the Spa is actually nowhere near finished and probably won't be until July. If only Banes and the builders had been as efficient as the mag's distributors, no one would ever have known that Carol and Jerry's super day out never happened!

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER

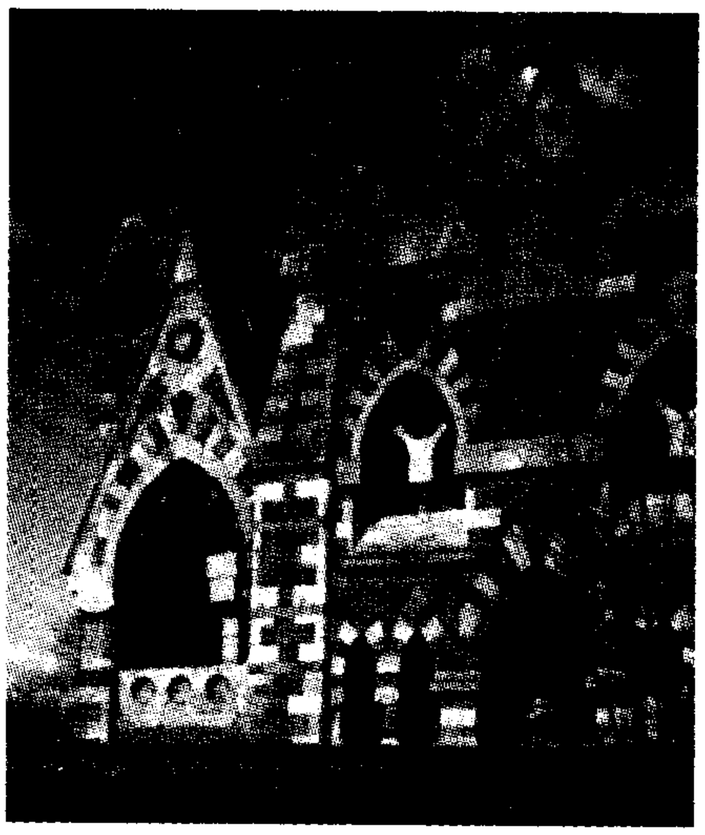
RIGHT, GUYS, WE'VE MISSED THE LAST TUBE, LET'S GRAB A MINICAB
HEAVENS NO! THEY'RE FAR TOO DANGEROUS
WE'D NEVER TAKE THE RISK
BUT YOU'RE BOTH STRAPPING LADS...
OH WE CAN CERTAINLY HANDLE OURSELVES
IT'S THOSE GRIMY SEATS - THEY'RE LETHAL FOR QUALITY CRUSHED VELVET

NOOKS and CORNERS

ONE of the great (sick) jokes in the new, self-confident devolved Scotland is that the country has a Policy on Architecture. As far as anyone can understand it, the Scottish Executive's policy is to spend as much public money as it takes (£300m and rising) to complete the gratuitous new parliament building nobody (apart from the late, unlamented Donald Dewar) wanted. As there is no other money in the kitty, anything else can go hang or rot – especially boring, irrelevant old buildings.

One great piece of architecture (which suffers from being unfashionably historic) is Trinity Church at Irvine, whose predicament I discussed in *Eye* 1062. Things are now going from bad to worse. This abandoned, vandalised church is, if not the only thing in Irvine worth seeing, certainly the only thing worth going to see.

It is a masterpiece by that wayward, enigmatic genius F.T. Pilkington, one of the Victorian architects classified as a "rogue" by Goodhart-Rendel. Pilkington was perhaps the only Gothic Revival architect to come to terms with the requirements of Nonconformist congregations and fully to exploit the freedom of his Ruskinian Gothic style. His interiors are like theatres, focused on the pulpit, with the space contained by rippling, spikily gabled walls. He was a true original and his buildings are extraordinary. Goodhart-Rendel found his Barclay Church in Edinburgh "really frightening"; others find it exciting, fantastic.



Trinity Church was built in 1861-63 and is now listed grade A. Its tall, massive, distinctive steeple is still the principal landmark in Irvine, despite the tower blocks that sprouted when the unfortunate place was smashed up in the 1960s and made into a New Town in the orbit of Glasgow. Indeed, in its glory Trinity Church is a symbol of what Irvine was and might be. So, naturally, it was abandoned by the Church of Scotland, the interior vandalised and the building threatened with demolition.

In 1974 Thorbjørn Campbell set up the Trinity Church Trust to rescue it. With the help of Irvine development corporation, money was found to make the building wind and watertight, and the great wheel window was repaired. The problem was finding a new use for the church. Eventually it became a sort of arts centre, but that has now collapsed and – to the shame of North Ayrshire council – the building is now closed, abandoned and vandalised more than ever.

The Trinity Church Trust has applied for listed building consent for demolition, having despaired of finding the £1.5m needed to repair it. So what is the council's response? Why, to flog it to the Japanese.

Last month three council members flew (secretly) to Tokyo (public cost: £5,500) to try to sell the building to the Sun Life Corporation of Hiratsuka, a company which earlier bought the Dreghorn & Springside parish church for re-erection as a wedding venue. The council eventually admitted that "the ethos of the trip as a whole is to network with a range of Japanese political, business, sports and cultural figures". So, lacking the imagination and will to find a new use for Trinity Church and the money to restore it, the politicians would rather dispose of a listed building, one of the great buildings of Scotland. So much for a Policy on Architecture.

Buildings are designed for a particular location and are rooted in the ground; they belong where they were raised. Re-erection elsewhere not only means damage and falsification to both structure and meaning, but is merely a cynical and lazy way to dispose of a problem. It can very occasionally be justified if there is no other alternative to destruction, or if there is a special reason – as with the re-erection of the bombed-out City of London church of St Mary Aldermanbury at Fulton, Missouri, where Churchill gave his Iron Curtain speech. But neither applies in Irvine.

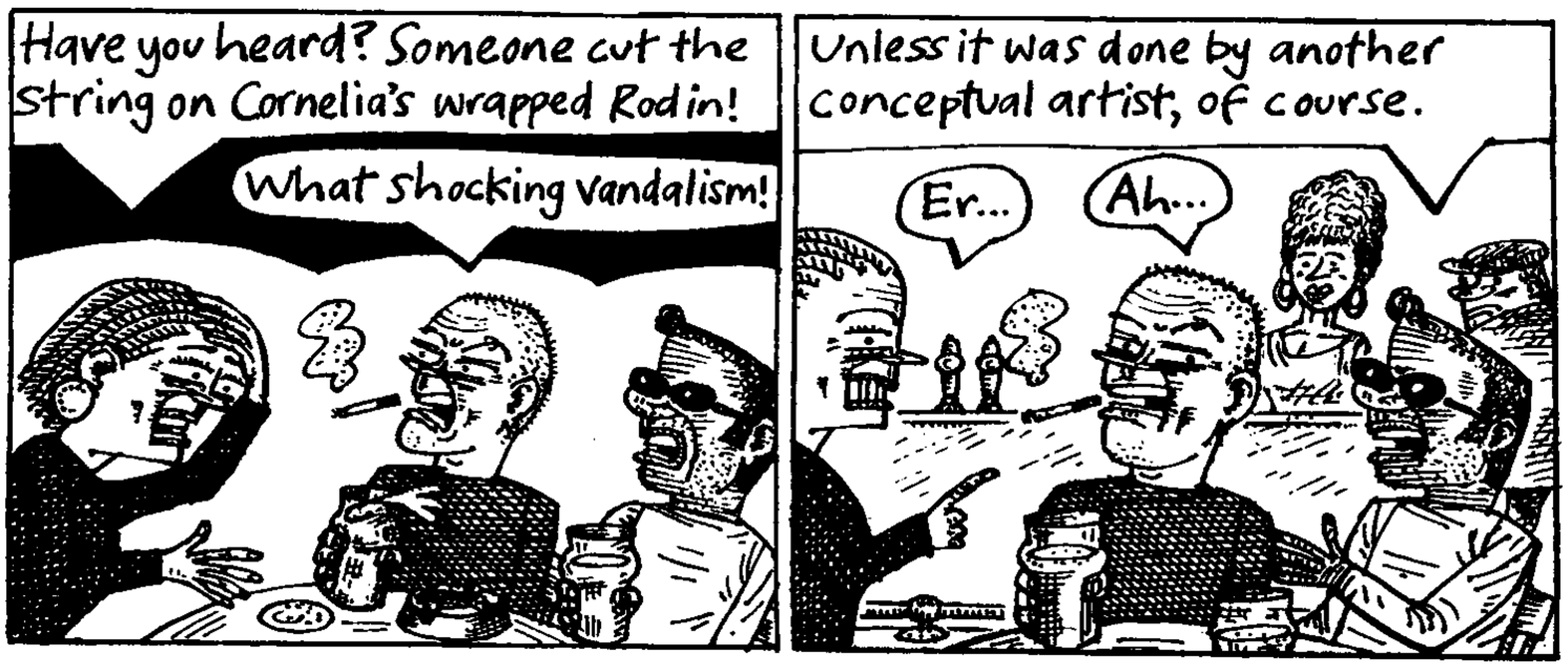
The Policy on Architecture in Scotland document rightly notes: "Just as buildings can bring order, meaning and value to our activities as individuals, so our collective existence is made more or less humane by the physical quality of our urban and rural environments. And this physical quality of our towns and cities and countryside is important not only for our own well-being but also because of what it tells of us to others."

What the removal of Trinity Church will tell others about Scotland is clear. But what, I wonder, does Scotland's minister for tourism, culture 'n' sport think? He is "Lord" Mike Watson of Invergowrie, a Glasgow Labour *apparatchik*, who, when asked publicly to identify some living Scottish architects, failed to name a single one. There is no point in wondering what the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland thinks, as it has been abolished by the Scottish Executive. As for North Ayrshire council, it clearly couldn't care less about Irvine's greatest architectural asset.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Have you heard? Someone cut the string on Cornelia's wrapped Rodin!
What shocking vandalism!
Unless it was done by another conceptual artist, of course.
Er...
Ah...

I-SPY

Shanghai **(Michael Everitt)**

Guilin, S. China **(Karen Stafford)**

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs.)*

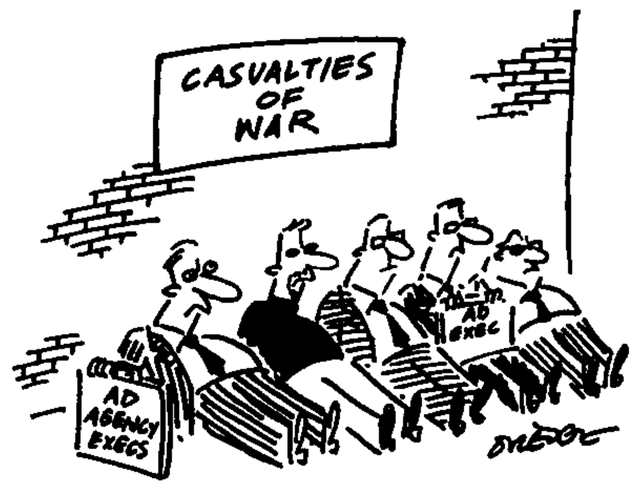
MUSIC & MUSICIANS

ROGER WRIGHT, the Radio 3 controller, has been protesting that he is standing firm by Reithian values and had no interest in chasing Classic FM's audience with Classic FM's methods. Really?

There was a worrying indication of how things are going the other week at a function to launch Radio 3's new autumn schedule. It took place in a Knightsbridge bar with waitresses who, apart from wearing tacky Radio 3 party hats, were dressed as bunny girls.

Normally this is the sort of thing the cantankerous Norman Lebrecht would moan about in his newspaper columns. Surely he is not keeping quiet because he has a Radio 3 phone-in show himself?

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'



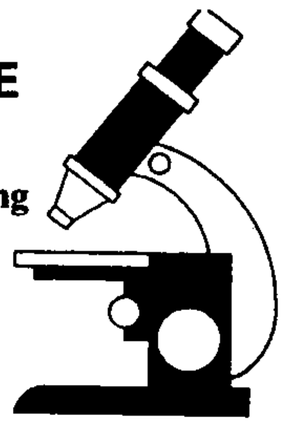
AD NAUSEAM

LAST year cheapo airline Easyjet announced that it was done with advertising agencies and would henceforth be producing its advertising in-house. A noble gesture in principle; but Stelios's minions appear to have run out of ideas pretty quickly, as their latest campaign is a flagrant crib.

The new press work pictures a bespectacled numby announcing that he never flies Easyjet. He is captioned as "George Smith, Management Trainee, aged 47". This bears an uncanny resemblance to a 1989 *Economist* poster which ran with the words "I never read The Economist" attributed to a "Management Trainee, 42". Simple, cheap and pitch-perfect, it was written by David Abbott, founding partner of Abbott Mead Vickers, which is now the biggest agency in the country. Everyone in adland knows it verbatim, and it's a public favourite as well: so much so, in fact, that in 1999 it was voted the fifth best poster of the last century.

Pinching someone else's ideas is commonplace in advertising, so Easyjet's in-house copywriters needn't feel too ashamed. But there are probably only five or six posters in advertising history that anyone remembers. Next time Easyjet should copy one of the remaining several million instead.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



BACK in 2000 Gordon Brown must have been giggling with disbelief as he pocketed £22.47bn from the auction of Britain's broadband mobile phone licences.

At the time, "third generation" (3G) mobiles, we were told, were going to change our lives by bringing wireless communications into the 21st century. Fast internet access, videocalls, email on the move, all at lightning speeds. Cynics predicted that "3G" should in fact stand for girls, gambling and games, claiming 3G would be appropriated by the lowest common denominator.

Three years later it all looks rather different. The first company to get up and running – Hutchinson Telecom, known here as "3" – recently handed out several dozen of the shiny new handsets to journalists (they go on general sale about now) and probably wished it hadn't. Reports came in of broken connections, patchy service and pointless services – such as movie trailer clips which you have to pay to download and then watch on a tiny screen.

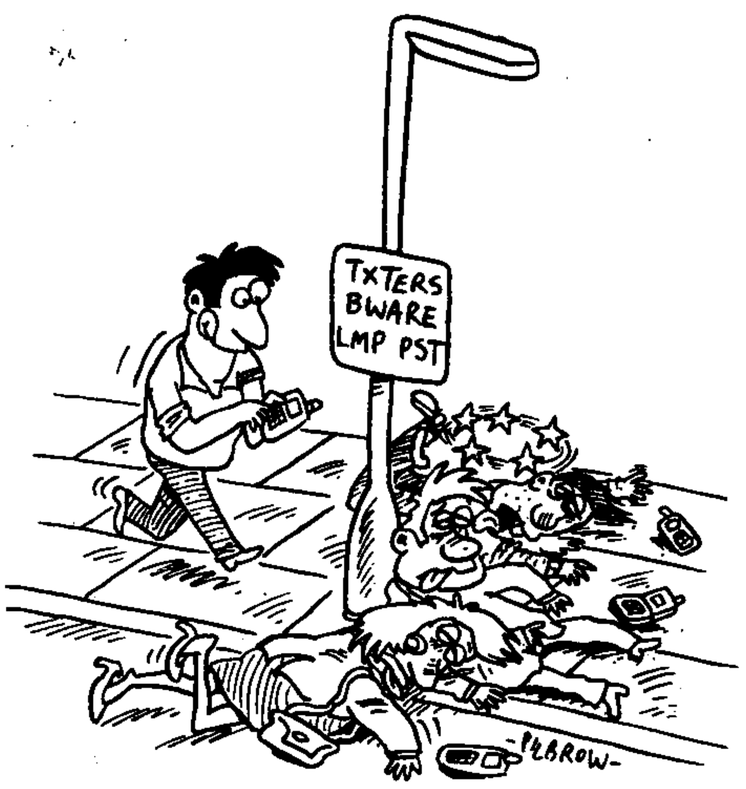
Most seriously, the promise of a fast, wireless internet connection (surely the true "killer-ap" of 3G) has not materialized. There is no access to the web, no hotmail; just a limited set of services including those trailers and soccer highlights.

3 does not like talking about internet access but is very keen to push the videocall service. "Show your lover your special place" is the thigh-slapping double entendre chosen by the company to plug the idea of seeing who you are talking to. It works, just, but the quality is poor. Most importantly, if you want your lover, friends or family to see you while you talk, you will have to buy them all a handset too – and at £400 a pop (plus £60 a month connection fee) that doesn't come cheap. So there are games, but no gambling – and the girls you have to provide yourself.

3G phones will probably catch on in the end (the first ordinary mobiles were pisspoor, eye-wateringly expensive and didn't work in the provinces – yet now we all have one). And the technology will no doubt improve. You may even be able to use them one day in, say, Devon. Most importantly, when the other licensees come on line, competition will drive prices down.

But Hutchinson (which paid £4.4bn for its licence), and its four competitors – Vodafone, O2, Orange and T-Mobile – must be praying history repeats itself (there have even been rumours that the firms have asked Gordon for some of their money back). After all, in other countries mobile phone licences came cheap: in Italy the figure raised was just £7bn, and in France the government got £12bn. In Sweden it was less than, er, £10,000.

'Boffin'



Letters

Private Eye

Gulf in understanding

Sir,

I feel I must write in response to the "Not ready for action man" advert (Eye 1076) as there are one or two minor errors and omissions.

A swarm of biting flies and insects – a layer of jam repels more than the issued insect repellent.

The single sheet of toilet paper issued for the tour, whilst accurate, is no longer an issue. The makeshift toilet facilities cause such a build up of "famine" flies that the need for toilet paper is negated.

A comprehensive sewing kit is essential equipment. The rush to get the boys into any sort of desert kit, to avoid bad press, means that we get dwarf sized clothing and are told to "make it fit". As well as fireman, policeman and government dogsbody, we are also seamstresses.

Only officers are allowed to use their mobile phones to phone home. The "great unwashed" do get a weekly 20-minute phone card, but no telephones as yet.

Action Man looks remarkably clean given the three-week turn-around for laundry. On the personal hygiene side our last lot of toiletries were obtained by trading ration packs with an ITN reporter, as our logistics can't even get this right.

Action Man's skin shows no signs of the quite common contact dermatitis or eczema, caused by inability to rinse hand-washed clothes properly as water is often scarce.

Action Man is not carrying his respirator. This is because he realises that it probably won't save him anyway. Out-of-date respirator canisters have been "relifed" so that those made in 1989 can still be used. The manufacturers' shelf life is 10 years.

Despite this, morale is still high as we're used to it by now.

Yours,
THE BOYZ,

Telic, The Gulf.

Ba'ath time

Sir,

With reference to issue 1076, I would like to express concern about erroneous information you have published concerning Ahmed Chalabi.

I quote from p.28: "Chalabi comes from a wealthy Shi'ite family which fled Iraq in 1958 when the Ba'ath party overthrew the monarchy." This is not only untrue but grossly misleading, since it was not the Ba'ath party which overthrew the (British-installed) monarchy in 1958, but a coup orchestrated by the "Free Officers", headed by General Abd al-Karim Qasim, which was generally acclaimed by the Iraqi people.

The Ba'ath party staged a coup in 1963, when Abd al-Karim Qasim was killed, and the first Ba'ath regime took power, although this was pretty well overthrown later that year. The Ba'ath party subsequently retook power in the 1968 coup which heralded the second Ba'ath regime, which has lasted until now, although Saddam Hussein did not become leader of the party until 1979.

Faithfully,
ALEX BELLEM,

Via email.

Zimbabwe riposte

Sir,

I write with reference to your article "Arms to Zimbabwe: Stumped for an answer" (1076).

1. Mr Lamb was given factual details of my completely transparent investment in the DRC, by way of a joint venture with the DRC Government (which investment has yet to show a return).

2. He was advised that I (and many other interested Governments and non-Governmental parties) vigorously rejected the allegations contained in the UN Report and are actively involved in contesting the Report (as a result of which the Security Council have mandated the Report's authors to reconvene and review, and correct, where applicable, the allegations contained in the original Report.

3. He was advised that neither I, nor BAe Systems, had anything to do with supply of Hawk spare parts to the Zimbabwean Armed Forces last year, and I have certainly not contravened any sanctions of whatsoever nature.

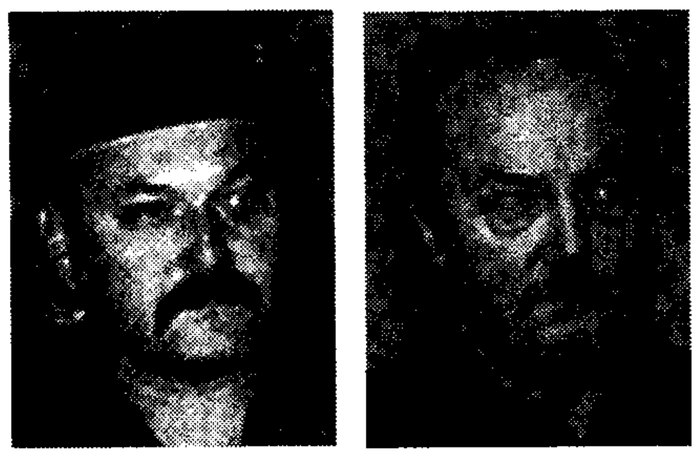
4. He was advised that the Hawk spare parts were probably supplied by the Kenyan Government to the Zimbabweans, and this was known to the British Government.

5. He was advised that I have twice communicated with consular officials in Zimbabwe (being a Zimbabwean national and Zimbabwe based) and that there were two subjects for discussion. The first was to report on an initiative to solve the Zimbabwean land resettlement issue. The second was to express my surprise and dismay at allegations that were being raised in parliament under the cloak of privilege, without observing the basic tenet of natural justice – ie giving myself the right to be heard in reply, or a forum in which to respond.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN A. BREDENKAMP,

Harare, Zimbabwe.

Lookalike



Galloway **Loyalist**

Sir,

This photograph of a commander of the Republican Guard reminds me strangely of George Galloway.

But I am sure that they cannot possibly be related.

ENA B. TUDOR,

Via email.

From Russia with love?

Sir,

Regarding your news story on page 3 of the current issue concerning Russian Antonov transport aircraft. You are correct that this aircraft is being used by the RAF but I understand that they are ex-Russian surplus being operated by a privately owned company and nothing to do with the highly principled ex-communist regime.

Yours airccurately,
PETER WHITE,

Via email.

Supporting royalty

Sir,

Am I the only one to be disappointed that the cover price has not fallen now that you are in receipt of enormous Murdoch payments for the syndication of your Number Crunching feature in the Times?

DAVID SIMPSON,

Via email.

●As you point out, the Times ripped off this feature, including the name, but has sadly failed to pay the Eye for it. Ed.

Scenes You Seldom See

"I'm neutral as a matter of fact, but I always like Manchester United to win"

Rambling on

Sir,

I'm puzzled that the Eye has been seduced so easily by a vociferous minority of "walkers, blackberry pickers and dog walkers" ("Open Spaces", Eye 1076). Contrary to the central allegation, English Nature has no power to "close hundreds of acres of public access land", and no desire to do so. The fences in question are to keep livestock in, not people out. This point is made time and time again when efforts are made to restore grazing on common land, but unfortunately some choose not to listen. Public access normally continues on grazed commons as before, with the rather trivial difference that gates have to be opened to get in or out (rather like most countryside footpaths, in fact). Heathland is not only home to a significant part of Britain's threatened biodiversity, it is also a unique landscape to be cherished and maintained as part of our national heritage (as per Hardy's "blasted heath" etc). Unless grazing is restored, all this will go. Rather a shame to put the boot in when, for once, a government body is trying its best with scarce resources to do something the majority of people readily understand and appreciate. Not often you can say that.

Yours faithfully,
PROFESSOR TREVOR BEEBEE,

University of Sussex.

Sir,

Re Open Spaces (Eye 1076). The opening few lines of this piece echo the Eye's stance on rights of way legislation in all previous issues; "plucky citizens assert their democratic right to roam against wicked, and powerful landowners" etc. etc. The reality for many rural dwellers is very different. On smaller properties owned by people on quite modest incomes, rights of way often pass directly adjacent to private houses and through gardens.

Most "serious" ramblers (the ones who fought for the rights of way act) are models of discretion and discipline when walking through other people's property. Unfortunately we don't see many of them. The majority of people who walk through our private space commit one or more of the following: trespassing into private areas (very common), dropping litter, picnicking in private areas of our property, illegal fishing, theft, vandalism, dogs off leads who foul and kill wildlife, noise and general invasion of privacy. The worst part of this is that most of these "walkers" think they have a perfect right to trespass on any area of our property and are most aggressive when told that it is not a public facility but rather, someone's home.

The unpleasant truth hidden behind all the Spartist "right to roam" rhetoric is that to enable ramblers to enjoy what is after all a leisure pursuit for a few sunny days in the summer, others must lose their privacy and quality of life the year round without any form of redress.

Regards,
FRANKLIN B. LEE,

Via email.

Church grouse

Sir,

Dear old Piloti is seldom more entertaining than when ranting about church modernisation, and his/her column in Eye 1076 is one of the finer examples of the art.

Yet again, Piloti reminds us that Christians do not have the same mortal needs as other people. They don't, apparently, require such newfangled luxuries as lavatories, facilities to make coffee and socialise, comfortable seats or space for the younger members of their group. Oh no! They should think themselves lucky to be able to go about their business in buildings unchanged for centuries. What was good enough for the public in the Middle Ages is good enough for the Modern Christian, whose prime responsibility is to Maintain the Nation's Heritage Without Change.

If these needless fripperies were permitted it would only encourage more people to go to church, and perhaps to spend more time there for Christian activities other than Sunday services. Even worse, churches might become local centres for neighbourhood or cultural activity. This would never do.

More people in the buildings would damage the ancient fabric and destroy the delightfully melancholic, decaying, deserted atmosphere which now surrounds so many of our beautiful old churches.

Go Piloti!

Yours faithfully,
J. ROBINSON,

Via email.

So good we ran it twice

Sir,

Do you by any chance employ Crapita as Features Editors?

Immediately after the story of David Blunkett revealing the 100% increase in public money paid to Capita from 2002 to 2003, appeared... er, the same story.

An increase of 100%!!!

People in glass houses shouldn't throw orgies.

MICK HOBAN,

Via email.

Good cause and effect

Sir,

Your 4 April issue (p13) is wrong to suggest that Camelot's advertising featuring beneficiaries of Lottery funding could be in breach of its Advertising Code of Practice.

The adverts do not make any suggestion that people should play the Lottery instead of contributing to charity. We would not accept it if they did. Instead, they make the point that playing the Lottery is worthwhile because it has created many beneficiaries. This was the reason that it was established, and why the Government is setting up a Joint Promotional Unit to increase awareness of the Lottery's social benefits.

Yours faithfully,
MARK HARRIS,

Chief Executive, National Lottery Commission.

Saddle sore

Sir,

With regard to Rebecca Thomas's letter (1077): it's sadly true that some drivers of four-wheeled vehicles have little respect for cycle lanes. Quite possibly this is because they believe (as do 90 percent of cyclists) that the rightful place for bike riding is the pavement.

Regards,
PAUL TOWNSEND,

Whitstable, Kent.

Ginger nuts

Sir,

Mr Twyford (Letters, 1077) can be reassured that where I grew up, in Stevenage New Town, the game of ringing doorbells and running away was indeed known as "Knock Down Ginger". Not that I ever played it, you understand. I was a very boring child, and as this letter no doubt makes manifest, I have not, apparently, improved with age.

Cheers,
JUSTIN HORTON,

Via email.

Sir,

We were too poor to have doorbells in Lawrence Weston, Bristol, so as a lad I used to knock on the doors and run away. We called that "knock OUT ginger".

ALASDAIR DUNFORD,

Via email.

Sir,

I have no idea what all this "Knock up ginger" nonsense it. In my day it was always called "Ding-Dong leg-it".

MARTIN DAVIES,

Via email.

Sir,

In my youth, the age old door knocking prank was known as "Thunder & Lightening", as one "knocked like thunder", and then "ran like lightening".

Regards,
BOB TEASDALE,

Via email.

Sir,

It was knock DOWN ginger as all us unfortunate red-heads remember very clearly (with nightmares).

CHRISTINE HOLT,

Via email.

Sir,

"Knock Down Ginger" is the correct name for the ancient children's game. My late grandmother who played it in the 1890s in Bermondsey always referred to it as such. However, her favourite pastime was "Shit Finger Dick" played with her two brothers.

One end of a stick was smeared with dog's mess which her brothers would place crap end forward on top of a wall of about adult height. The boys would then cross to the other side of the road whilst Gran would wait for a passing "Toff". Nodding towards her brothers she would wail, "Oh sir, those boys have thrown my stick up on the wall, could you get it for me please?" As the obliging gentleman got a nasty surprise, the children would add insult to injury by yelling, "Yah, Shit Finger Dick!" before running away.

Yours faithfully,
BILL BAKER,

Via email.

Sir,s

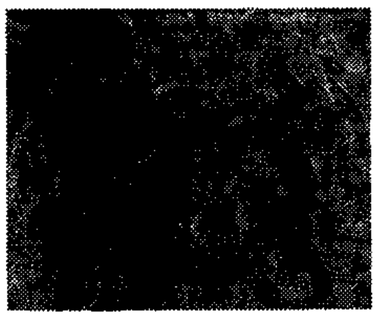
With reference to HP Sauce (1076), surely the "Ancient practice of ringing doorbells and running away" is called Parcel Force.

Yours faithfully,
ROY CLEMENTS,

Gloucester.

Lookalike

Caveman



Holder

Sir,

I could not help noticing a resemblance between Noddy Holder (ex-Slade) and the caveman on the front of a recent TV listing.

I wonder if they are related – as indeed we all are.

RICHARD BEASLEY,

Winchester, Hants.

French letters

Sir,

I am grateful to Mr Nashef for reminding me of that delightful phrase "il y a du monde au balcon". My belief regarding the use of the word as a euphemism for bosom comes from my hearing a French lady comment of her brother's pulchritudinous partner by saying, inter alia, "il est content d'avoir du balcon".

Yours,
PROFESSOR ALAN BULLOCK,

Leeds.

Sir,

Regarding the use of the word "balcon" to mean bosom, there is a less "delightful" – though more catchy – expression than that described by Samer Nashef (Eye 1077). The rhyme "Les nichons au balcon" is roughly the French equivalent of "Get your tits out for the lads".

Yours not so euphemistically,
JOHN CHILTON,

Via email.

Sir,

Samer Nashaf has led a sheltered life. There are any number of Donald McGill-style postcards on sale in France which describe a bosom as a "balcon". My favourite French term for this portion of the female anatomy, is however, "les airbags".

JOHN EALES,

Via email.

Sir,

Not being overly well-endowed in the "Page 3" department I have, on occasion, resorted to the purchase of a "soutien-gorge" in the curiously-named M&S Padded Balcony range. How uplifting then to learn, through the erudition of Messrs Bullock and Nashef (Eyes 1076 and 1077) the obvious thinking behind this supportive garment whose name hitherto conjured up rather worrying images of high-rise prison cells.

Yours sincerely but sadly, sans beaucoup de monde au balcon,
PRISCILLA APPELBE,

Via email.

More smut, please

Sir,

I read with surprise and some amusement Rod Holt's letter (Eye 1077) about your quite delightful crossword. Where on earth has Mr Holt been all this time? Is he still living in Victorian times? I wonder if he and Mrs Holt have any children.

I too am a relatively new subscriber, and Cyclops' naughty puzzle has fast become my favourite item. Not that I can actually do it, but I look forward with some excitement to reading the "smutty" clues and equally smutty answers from the previous issue.

More of the same please Cyclops.

(I must remember to delete this email before my husband catches me.)

Yours,
JULIA CAMPBELL,

Via email.

Sir,

In reply to Mr Holt's letter (1077) I would like to ask that Cyclops not "clean up his act". Not only do I take childish delight in the nature of his clues, but I have on several occasions only been able to complete the crossword by knowing the answer must have something to do with sex or excretion.

Yours faithfully,
JACOBY HAYWARD (MRS),

Stoke on Trent.

Sir,

I take great offence at Rod Holt's assumption that we women readers are averse to a bit of smut and innuendo (1077). As a female reader of many years, I have now reached the point where I can complete the crossword almost every time, unaided. I take great pleasure in this and would feel betrayed and disappointed if Cyclops were forced to clean up, just because Mr Holt's wife is a complete Doris.

Yours sincerely,
KAREN McDONALD,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"So, United then, all in red, with their white shorts and black socks."

FRASER DEIGNTON, Century FM
(John Rukin)

"All in all, a good year for female actresses..."

LBC
(Sue May)

"In football, you can never say anything is certain. The benchmark is 38-40 points. That has always been the case. That will never change."

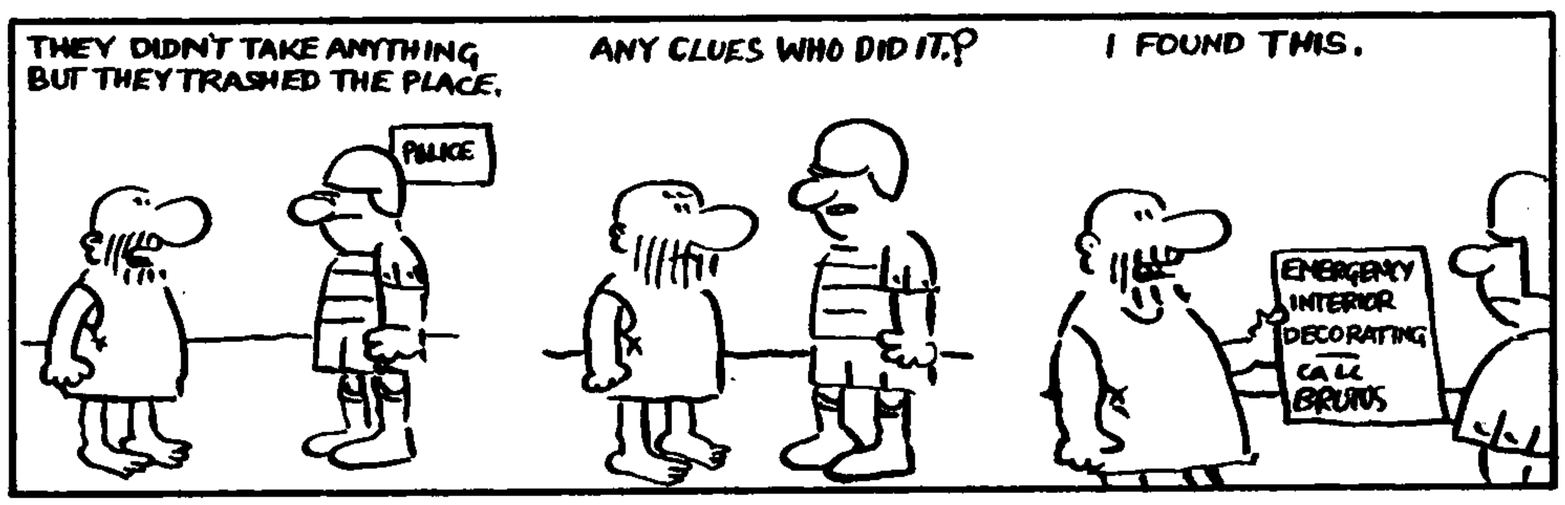
STEVE BRUCE, teamtalk.com
(Joe Churcher)

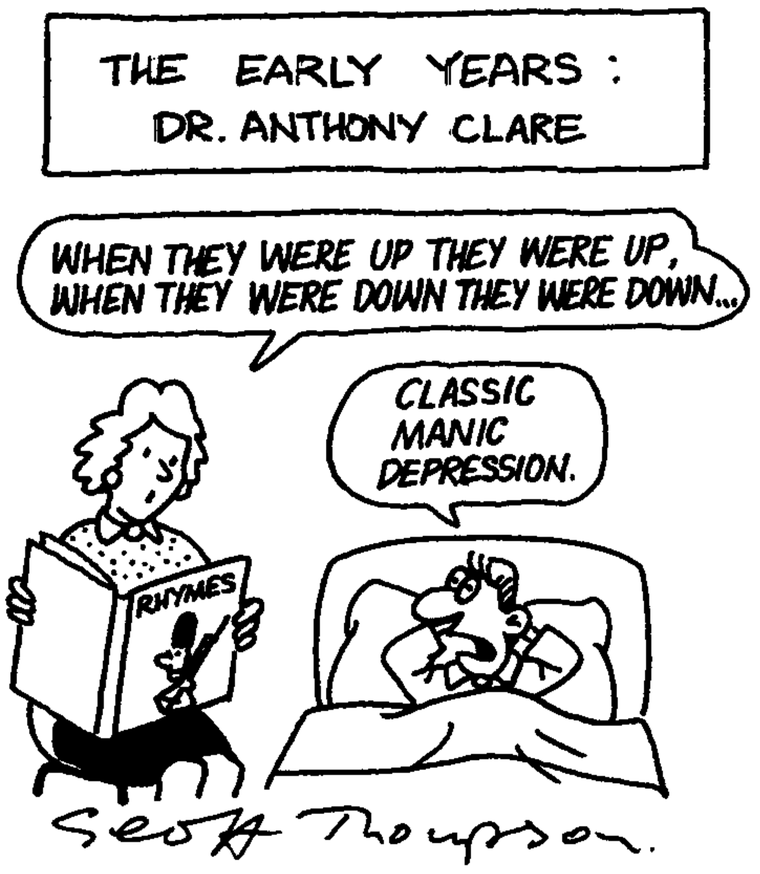
"Wayne Rooney really has a man's body on a teenager's head."

GEORGE GRAHAM, Sky TV
(Tony Kinsella)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN




THE EARLY YEARS : DR. ANTHONY CLARE
WHEN THEY WERE UP THEY WERE UP, WHEN THEY WERE DOWN THEY WERE DOWN...
CLASSIC MANIC DEPRESSION.
RHYMES
Scott Thompson.

Sir,

What is Rod Holt on for goodness sake? Surely his sanctimonious, sexist moan was an All Fools' Day spoof.

I'm a 66-year-old granny and once a fortnight for years have looked to see if I'm the lucky winner.

Keep it up Cyclops!

Regards,
MARGARET RABY,

Lincolnshire.

Sir,

My patrician mother-in-law aged 87 seems to complete your crossword before it hits the mat. As she lives in the sheltered purlieus of North Devonshire, I wonder how she knows what she knows.

Yours etc,
MRS J CARTER,

Farnham, Surrey.

Sir,

I trust your correspondent Rod Holt will soon become reconciled to the traditional vulgarity of the Private Eye crossword. This dates back to its early days when the setter was the Labour MP, Tom Driberg, whose efforts at least kept him away from his well-known cottage industry.

The winners in those days included a Robert Runcie of St Albans and, on another occasion, his wife. Perhaps this will assure the continued participation of Rod Holt and his wife, along with any aspiring archbishops and their partners.

Best wishes,
ARTHUR HALL,

Goring-by-Sea, W. Sussex.

Sir,

Further to Rod Holt's criticism of the smuttiness of the crossword clues, I suspect that Cyclops is not only mired in innuendo but also manufactures the name of the alleged winner.

Gaynor Withers, indeed! We can all write our Cyclopean clues to that name. And it's an anagram of "a stringy whore"! Need I say more? "Oh try swearing"!

We should be told how the editor and his cronies spend the £100.

Yours faithfully,
ALAN CLAGUE,

Thatcham, Berks.

Janice loves animals and can often be seen walking her west highland terrorist around the ward.

Morecambe Labour Party newsletter

Letter from **Buenos Aires**

from Our Own Correspondent

IT'S election season here in Argentina, a national sport that brings out the worst in our politicians — who are already held in such low esteem that many of them do not dare appear openly on the streets.

A hint of what we can expect in this month's presidential contest comes from the small, poor province of Catamarca. There, Peronist senator Luis Barrionuevo was barred from standing in elections in March for governor because he has not lived in the area long enough. He was so enraged that he and his paid thugs raided election stations, burned ballot boxes and wrecked the premises. They caused so much damage the elections had to be postponed. Nevertheless, the Peronist-dominated senate in Buenos Aires decided Barrionuevo did not merit being sanctioned let alone expelled from the party.

In the first round of the presidentials we are being offered not one but three "Peronist" candidates. The Peronist movement, a nationalist party with fascist tendencies, has been our main political force since the days of General Peron in the mid-1940s. This time, though the party leaders have not allowed any of the three to stand as an official candidate, one or other is sure to win.

The current frontrunner is Nestor Kirchner, whose only qualification is that he has been governor of a small and obscure province in the south. But he does have the backing of president Eduardo Duhalde. There can be no substance to allegations, however, that Mr Kirchner has thus benefited from the support of the apparatus of state. It's a coincidence his campaign events have proved so popular with national television.

The second "Peronist" candidate is Adolfo Rodriguez Saa, who is so rich he doesn't need state help in his campaign. Unkind characters link his legendary wealth to his years in public service as a provincial governor. He has already been president — for five days during the economic and political chaos at the end of 2001, when the currency collapsed and the elected president fled in a helicopter. No one is clear what Mr Saa's policies might be, but if he wins, he's sure to look good: he has offered $20m to Argentine film producers to film in his San Luis province.

The man both fear is another ex-president, Carlos Menem, who has already been president for a decade but is keen to serve another two terms. Perhaps this is to provide a future for the children the 72-year-old is said to be expecting with his new young wife, Chilean beauty queen Cecilia Bolocco. She has been seen visiting a fertility clinic in Buenos Aires, although she denies this and says it was her sister.

Many of us were surprised that Menem was allowed to stand at all. He was put under house arrest for five months in 2001 while he was investigated for selling arms to Ecuador and Croatia in defiance of UN bans. Nothing has ever been proved against him – certainly not allegations that he received millions from the Iranian authorities not to pursue those behind terrorist attacks in Buenos Aires against the Israeli embassy and a Jewish cultural centre nine years ago, in which dozens of people were killed.

The smart money is on either Duhalde or Menem winning through. Neither is very forthcoming about how they will drag our sinking country out of the mud. But they seem keen to have a go. Money is changing hands and both sides seem pretty relaxed about the use of local muscle to stop rivals' meetings.

It's not an edifying choice. No wonder the longest queues in town are at the visa departments at foreign embassies, and that airline business has rarely been so good.

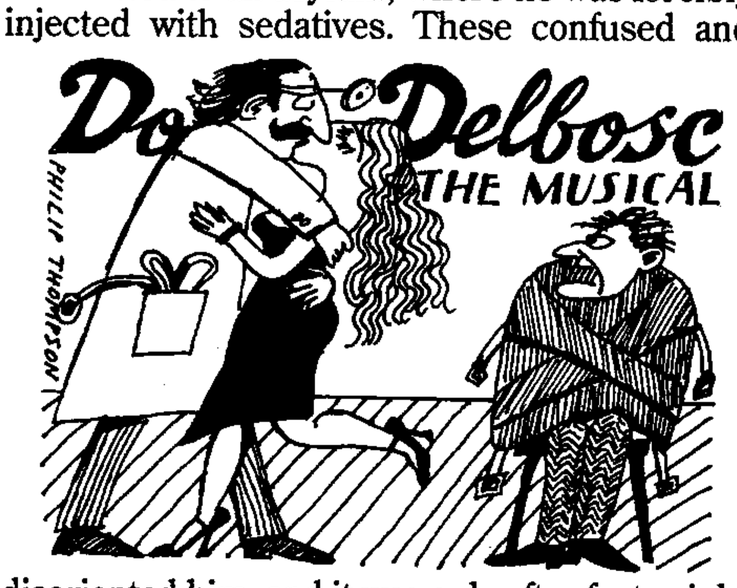
FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Doctors are required to keep their professional and personal lives separate," the disciplinary committee of the French Medical Association told Dr Jean-Marie Delbosc in Bordeaux, "and your behaviour has clearly blurred that distinction. You knowingly used false health certificates to have a perfectly sane man committed to a mental institution for seven weeks, simply so that you could have an affair with his wife. That is totally unacceptable conduct."

Earlier, the committee had heard how Dr Delbosc, a fifty-four-year-old gynaecologist, had temporarily disposed of his love rival, a dentist named Martial Corlouer. "Once Dr Delbosc had decided on his course of action," declared the prosecuting counsel, "he began persuading his colleagues to issue medical certificates, stating that M. Corlouer was insane.

"Surprisingly, they readily agreed, without even examining the patient. One described the dentist as 'unstable and potentially dangerous,' and another stated that he was 'suffering from an acute paranoid delirium, evolving toward a major risk of violence'. Within hours, M. Corlouer found himself in a straitjacket and committed to an asylum, where he was forcibly injected with sedatives. These confused and



disoriented him, and it was only after forty-eight days that he was eventually able to convince the authorities of his sanity, and secure his release from the institution. Meanwhile, Dr Delbosc had moved in with Mme Corlouer, who has since filed for divorce."

In a written statement, M. Corlouer told the committee that he had lodged a "strong letter of complaint with the police" protesting about the plot to remove him from society and to make it easier for his wife to divorce him. He was now busy campaigning for stricter laws on the commitment of the insane, and was also discussing the sale of his story for adaptation into a stage musical.

Dr Delbosc was found guilty of "knowingly using false health certificates". His colleague, Dr Denis Goube, was found guilty of "issuing a certificate based on imperfections in the clinical examination". Sentence was adjourned. *(Le Soir, 12/3/03. Spotter: Brendan O'Byrne)*

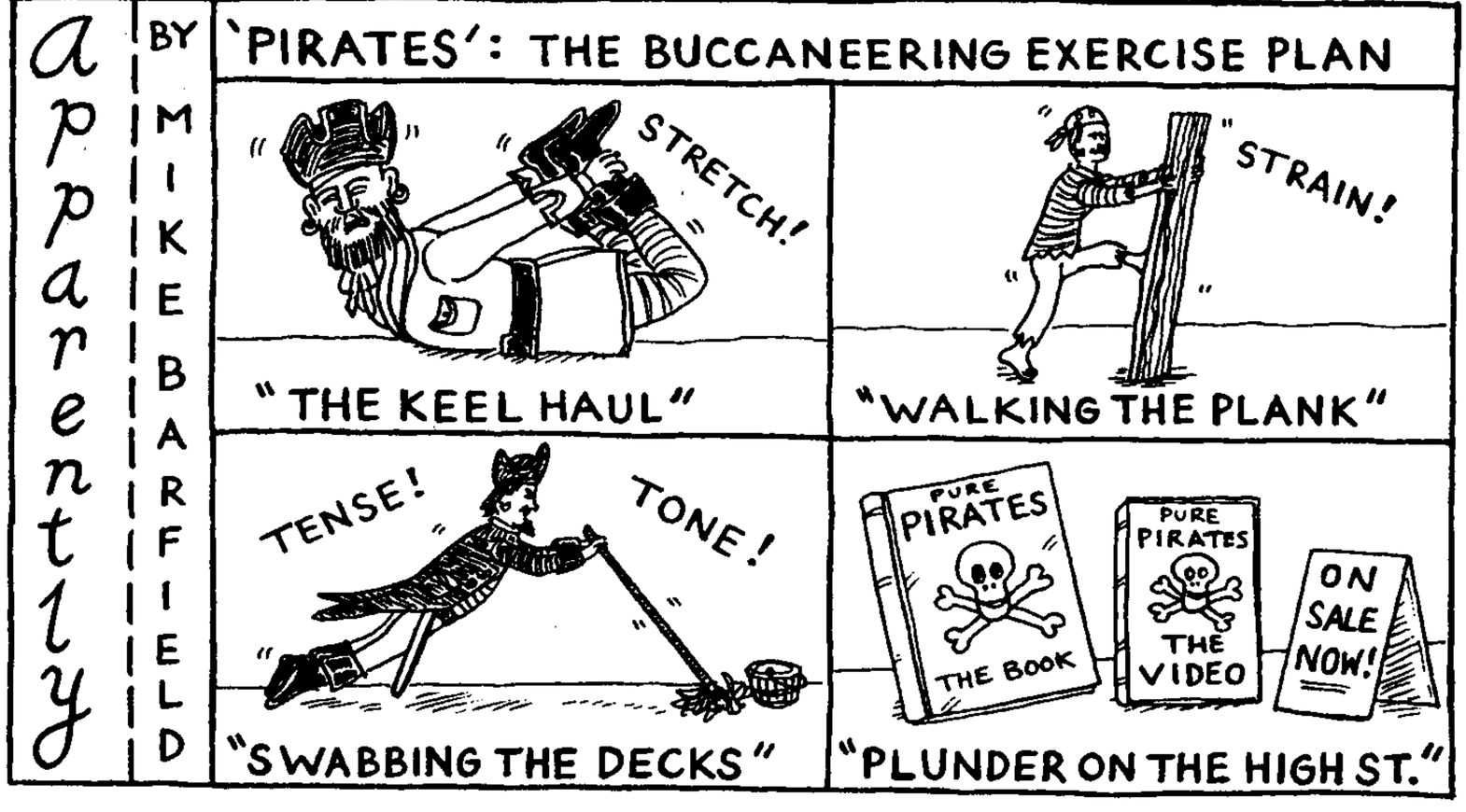
— ● —

● *"Sir, In response to the tough economic times the country has been going through, many Japanese housewives like myself have turned scrimping and saving into an art form. Last year, I decided that our monthly water bill of 10,000 yen was too much for a family of four, so I began making everybody wash their face in the same bowl of water each day. And to cut down on water used in dishwashing, I began covering all our plates and cutlery with plastic wrap, which I simply remove after each meal, leaving the utensils sparkling clean and in no need of a wash. Then I rinse out the plastic wrap, leave it to dry, and use it again. After a few washes, it doesn't cling to the cutlery so well, but never mind. I use elastic bands to hold it firmly in place, and that works just as well. We are now looking into the possibility of urinating into bowls containing advanced water filters and purifiers. It all makes perfect sense. Yours, Mrs Kosaku Yamamoto, Tokyo."* (Mainichi Weekly, 10/3/03. Spotter: Tom Pilgrim)

— ● —

● "Our sniffer dogs are very good at finding drugs," a police spokesman told reporters at the airport in New Delhi, "but they're no good at identifying exactly what it is that they've found. Drugs sold on the streets, like hash and heroin, are often mixed with anything from boot polish to cat litter, and although we can usually detect opium by the smell, we often have no idea what we're dealing with. Laboratory tests take several days, and portable testing kits are unreliable, so when we need to know immediately what the substance is, that's when we call in the tasters.

"It may seem unconventional, but addicts are experts in their field, so why not take advantage of their skills? We go to particular slums, depending on what we think the drug is, let the local junkies sample our find, and pay them a fee for their opinion. For official purposes, we then send it off to the laboratory for analysis, but there's no need, because the tasters are never wrong. They always know if we're dealing with the real thing, and can always tell what it's been cut with." *(Saudi Gazette, 24/2/03. Spotter: Neil Russell-Bates)*



BAGHDAD Loot

For sale

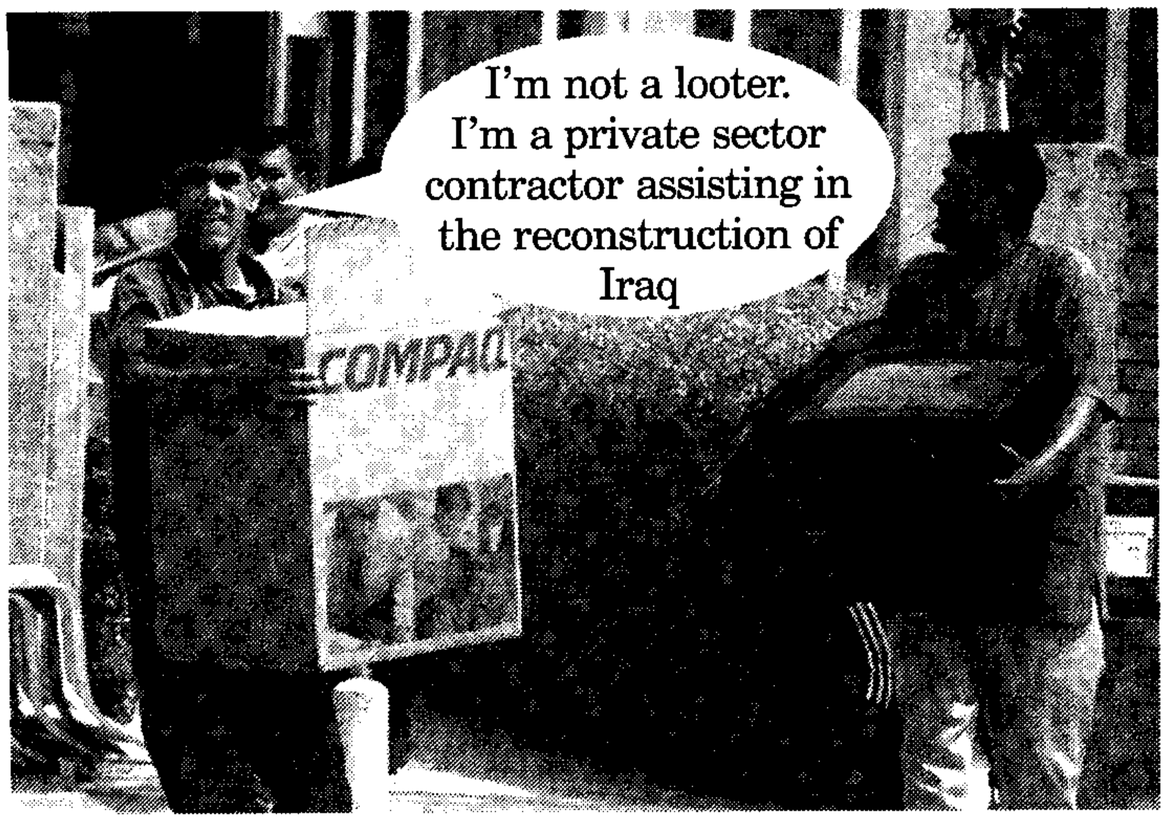
● **Heart monitor**, hardly used, $10 o.n.o Apply Ali. Ref 1496.

● **3rd century Sumerian alabaster head**, possibly Shalman Rushdee III, $7. Apply Mohammed. Ref 7342.

● **Filing cabinet**, ex-Ministry of Information, some files missing, $22. Apply Saddam (no relation, honestly). Ref 8993.

● **Weapons of mass destruction**, guaranteed genuine, authenticated by D. Rumsfeld (no relation) or possibly fridge, $3.29, buyer collect, Apply Assif. Ref 3783

More inside ▶



IRAQ WAR
An Apology

IN THE PAST three weeks, we at the BBC may have inadvertently given the impression through all our outlets that the Allied incursion into Iraq was a reckless political act which was militarily ill-conceived in every respect, unsupported by the Iraqi people, who regarded it as a ruthless invasion of their sacred homeland, and which was certain to end in total disaster. News headlines such as "Coalition Bogged Down In New Vietnam", "Baghdad Will Be Worse Than Stalingrad", "Blundering Coalition Forces On Brink Of Humiliating Defeat By Saddam's Super-Elite Special Republican Guard" may have given the impression that we believed in some way that the war was not going quite as well as planned.

In the light of recent events, we now accept – albeit with a very bad grace – that the coalition forces seem for the time being to have got away with it, and that large numbers of Iraqis, though clearly paid by the CIA to do so, may have appeared to be not entirely displeased at the downfall of a regime which, whatever its faults, did at least for 30 years guarantee the stability of a potentially explosive mix of Shias, Sunnis and Kurds, who will now undoubtedly plunge the whole region into a state of chaos which will threaten the peace of the world.

Whilst apologising for any confusion to which our reports may have given rise (and allowing for the fact that they could be broadcast only under monitoring restrictions imposed by the Iraqi authorities), we now realise that the only hope for future peace is for the hated Bush/Blair imperialist aggressors to be replaced at once by a French-led UN force of Russian troops of the type who were so successful in bringing peace to the Muslims of Groszny.

© The BBC (and Channel Four)

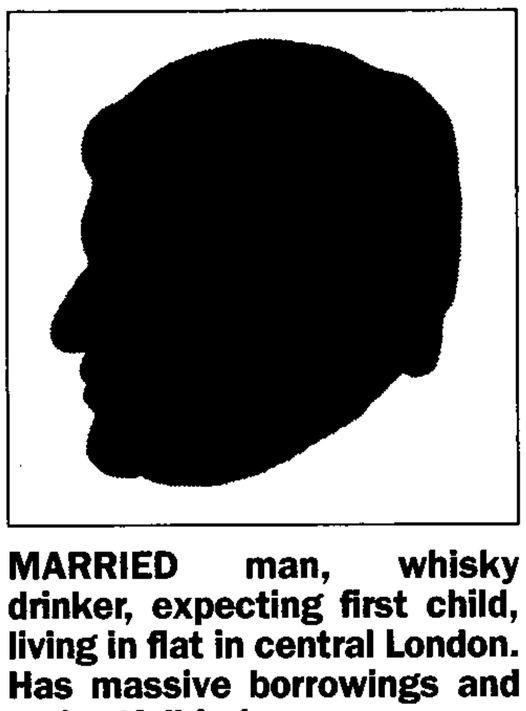
That 2003 Budget

Mr Brown's proposals in full

1. 8p on fags.
2. Income tax – no change.
3. Er...
4. That's it.

Winners and losers

LOSER



MARRIED man, whisky drinker, expecting first child, living in flat in central London. Has massive borrowings and a shortfall in income.

■ What he loses: The job he wants.

WINNER

MARRIED man with four children and high earning wife. Has houses in London and country plus 2 flats in Bristol.

■ What he has won: War, leadership contest, next election, etc.

BAGHDAD TIMES

FRIDAY APRIL 18 2003

Nation's art treasures vandalised by crazed mob (N. Serota)

by our Art correspondent ***Brihan Ahsool***

THE REST of the world looked on with horror as a group of fanatical Young British Artists stormed into the Tate Gallery, the cradle of British civilisation, and vandalised its priceless exhibits.

One statue, for example, Rodin's Kiss, was wrapped up in string making it impossible to see.

Said one viewer, "I am ashamed of my country. These people should be strung up. The Americans should intervene to stop this happening."

A Camel Driver Writes

Each week a well-known Arab commentator is asked to give his views on the state of the war.

THIS WEEK: **Saladin al-Nuttah** (Camel No. 341273)

See them Iraqis, guv? What a shower! Call themselves Arabs?! First shot fired in anger and they run up the white flag! Makes you ashamed to wear a moustache! Blimey! And then they go round lootin' all that stuff out the shops and that – even stealin' from sick kiddies in hospital and that! I don't know what the Arab world is coming to! That Saddam Hussein had the right idea – string 'em up! It's the only language they understand.

I had that John Simpson on the back of my camel once. Camel gave up halfway to the airport. Very heavy man.

© All newspapers in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, North London etc.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Field Marshal the Very Rev. A.R.P. Blair DSO

At ease!

Now, I am sure you will all be expecting me to take this opportunity to crow over our wonderful victory in casting out the power of the Evil One, side by side with our brother in arms, the Reverend Dubya of the Church of the Latter Day Morbombs.

Tempting though it might be to point out to most members of our congregation that I was right all along, and that they were utterly wrong, all of them, I am not going to do so.

I am particularly not going to single out for criticism our former organist Mr Cook, whose gross disloyalty shocked so many of you.

I am also not going to single out Mrs Short, for the slip of the tongue which led her to describe me as "reckless" on Mr Rawnsley's local radio programme on Sunday evenings, "Andy's Karaoke Half Hour".

Naturally I have forgiven Clare and have found it in my heart to say to her, "Look, Clare, I'm going to forgive you for being drunk and mad on this one occasion, particularly as you now look so foolish in the light of my great success."

In fact, there are a lot of people I am not going to single out for the contempt they deserve. People such as Mr Dalyell, Mr Marshall-Andrews, Mr Kilfoyle, Mr Livingstone, the Archbishop of Canterbury and His Holiness the Pope, not to mention the handful of a million parishioners who were misguided enough to march through the High Street causing great inconvenience to the Saturday afternoon shoppers who were doing so much to try to keep our St Albion's economy thriving.

To all those parishioners I can only quote the words of the Good Book: "Father, forgive them, for they know not anything at all" (Gospel according to St John the Keegan, 14.41).

Furthermore, I would remind all those people who I will not name that Mr Mandelson was present with his notebook during their "demonstration" and that he knows where they all live.

So, after this astonishing personal triumph for your vicar, how are we to sum up the historic events of the past few weeks?

Firstly, this is not a time for crowing, even over our friend in Tesco after the unfortunate recent incident when he threw an organic free-range tomato at me and called me a "war criminal"!

Secondly, this is not a time for looking back but for looking forward. And the main thing to which I am personally looking forward at this time is some expression of gratitude and indeed humility from all those parishioners who have been proved so hopelessly wrong!

Thirdly, this is no time for coming out on

the vicarage steps to say, "Rejoice, Rejoice!" even though this would be a perfectly reasonable reaction to our great victory!

Yours in triumph,

Tony

P.S. We will all be singing a special chorus this Sunday at Evensong specially adapted from a song that is popular with some of the older people in the congregation.

We have overcome,
We have overcome,
We have overcome,
Today,
Deep in my heart,
I do believe,
We have overcome,
Today!

Words and music © T. Blair

EASTER THOUGHT

"He is risen"

His followers thought he was finished.
The world thought he was mad.
But he proved them all wrong and came to life again.
Remind you of anyone? T.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

Although I am not a member of Reverend Blair's congregation and in fact am the incumbent of a small orthodox sect not far from here, I would like to congratulate the vicar for doing us all a service in ridding the world of the Great Satan. His achievement will surely go down in history as a triumph of courage, imagination and leadership. Should he wish to take charge of my congregation, I would be proud to hand over since I am certain he would make a better job of it than I have.

Yours in humility,
Father I. Duncan Smith,
The Church of Our Lady Thatcher,
St Albions.

The Editor reserves the right not to cut any letters as sensible as this one! A.C.

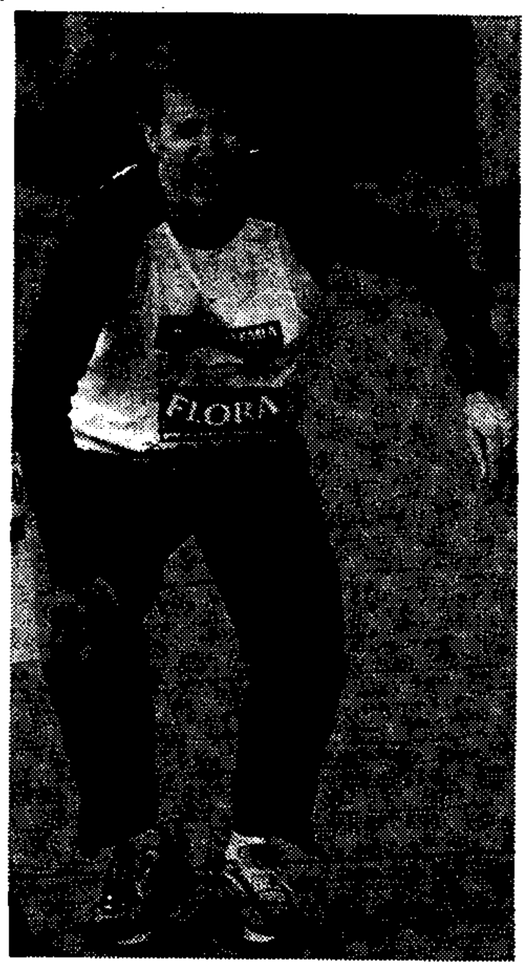
To Remember In Your Prayers

Mr Galloway who has been revealed as a practising Satanist and who has been caught worshipping the Great Satan in Babylon. Let us pray that George can be rid of the demons that have sent him mad but if that is not possible let us hope that he is driven over a cliff like unto the Gadarene swine to a painful death on the rocks below. T.B.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

☹ I am so sorry that Mr Brown's annual statement of parish accounts was overshadowed by other news! But perhaps that was just as well in the circumstances considering the embarrassing nature of much of what he had to tell us. No disrespect to Gordon, but he has made a bit of a pig's ear of our finances and no-one would blame him, least of all myself, if he decided after eight years that it was now time to hand over to a younger, more able man such as Mr Straw.

☺ Congratulations to Gordon Brown and his wife Prudence on their forthcoming happy event (and I don't mean his retirement). As I know from my own experience it is hard work being a father in later life so all the more reason for him to spend more time with his new family and not to be burdened with the parish accounts – particularly now that we have a huge black hole in them created by himself! So well done Gordon! T.B.



☺ Congratulations to Mr Campbell for winning the St Albion's Fun-Run! What an excellent example Mr Campbell has set to the rest of the parish – getting up and doing something positive instead of moaning about the vicar. Well done Mr C! A.C.

Message from Rev. Dubya, Church of the latter Day Morbombs

Rejoice! Rejoice!
To Our Brothers in Englandland – Greetings! As we predicted the forces of eviltude and dysfunctionality have been terminalized into a state of deconfliction. But rest not – Satan has moved on. And we must join him on the Road to Damascus. As your Mr Wilson Churchman put it so well many years gone by. "This is not the end. This is not the beginning of the end. This is not the end of the end of the beginning of the beginning. No, folks, it's the Begin the Beguine, and let us dance the night away in sweet rapture!!"

Yours, Rev. Dubya,
(US Marshall and Texas Ranger, 1st Class).

Mr Mandelson has kindly agreed to help the vicar in his campaign to take the collection in Euros. Over the coming months Mr Mandelson will be visiting you in your homes late at night to explain why this is a very good idea – whatever Gordon may say!! No offence Gordon but as we have discovered recently your grasp of matters monetary is a little bit shaky!! T.B.

A Service of Thanksgiving

We are pleased to announce that there will be a special thanksgiving service at 6.30 next Sunday to mark the generous gift of £2.5 million to parish funds made by our longtime benefactor and PCC member Mr Sainsbury. His donation is particularly welcome at a time when so many other former benefactors have been arrested and are not in a position to continue giving.

Also many parishioners have disgracefully failed to pay their dues, in a misguided gesture of protest at the Vicar's support for the crusade led by the Rev Dubya. So it is hoped that there will be a good turnout on Sunday, to say thank you in person to David, and to enjoy a get-together afterwards in the parish hall over a cup of GM coffee and Sainsbury's own-brand fish-flavoured Hob Nobs.

Order of Service

Hymn: "Oh when the Sainsbury's (go marching in)".
Reading: The Story of the Five Loaves or Less.
Sermon: By the Vicar on the text, "It is easier for a rich man to get into the PCC than a poor man."
Offertory Hymn: "For all the Sainsbury's (who for the Labour vote)".
At the end of the service all trolleys must be returned to the vestry.

EASTER EGG HUNT

Mr. Blix will no longer be in charge of the Easter Egg Hunt, because frankly he wouldn't be able to find one if it was staring him in the face! Instead we will have an independent Egg Hunter appointed by the Rev. Dubya. T.B.

PARISH SCOOP

For those of you who missed the interview with the vicar in Gaga Magazine (The Old Age Pensioner's Newsletter), here are some highlights of his chat with Mrs Grove.

"As I grow older (though not that much older!) I realise that, even though I am not getting any younger, I still keep young at heart (or try to!)."

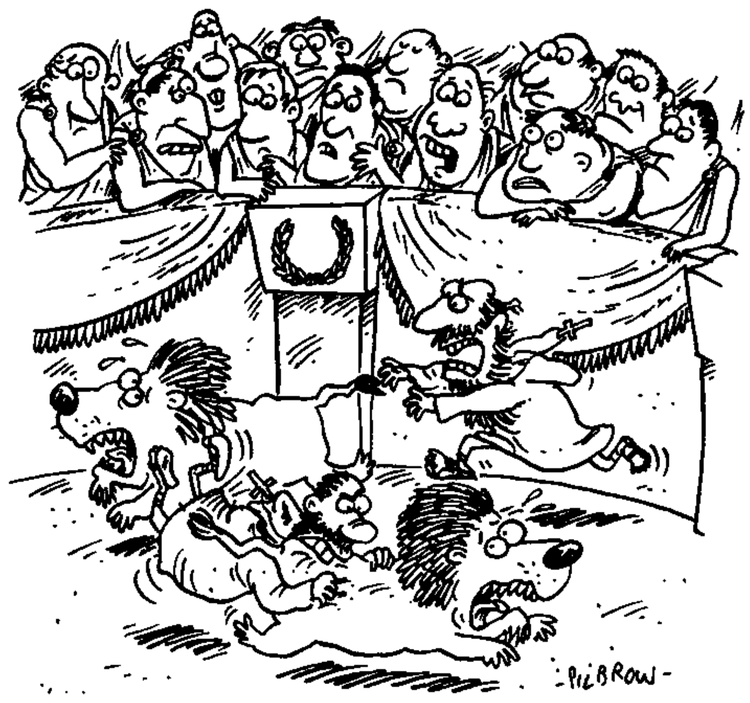
"Kids, eh? Goodness me, they keep you young! Just like playing the guitar, which I still somehow find time to do, as well as looking after the parish and doing the school run!"

"OK, I've reached the age of 50! But I still feel I've got a lot to contribute! I came into this job to do a job of work, and that's what I'm going to do!"

"The great thing about getting older, is that you learn how to trust your own judgement and nobody else's! (apart, that is, from Mr Campbell's, who was kind enough to put together my thoughts on being 50 for this interview!)"

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOLEY
WELL YEH, WE ALL REALISE THAT WAYNE ROONEY IS JUST A KID...
EVERTC
SO ITS IMPORTANT NOT TO PUT TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON HIM TOO SOON...
IT'S POT WAYNE, YOU CAN TRY COKE NEXT YEAR
WE'LL START THE BETTING AT £10,000 UNTIL YOU GET USED TO THE GAME



"Helluva half-time team talk"

Notes & Queries

QUESTION: Who invented the "Jiffy Bag"?

☐ MRS D. RUMSFELD is quite wrong in claiming that the Jiffy Bag was invented by an employee of the Pittsburgh Packaging Company in 1873. As surely everybody knows, this useful postal device was in fact the brainchild of a Belgian tax-collector and amateur entomologist, Maximilien Jiffé (1841-97), who filled envelopes with horsehair to protect specimens of moths he had collected in the jungles of the Belgian Congo in order to send them back to the Institute Papillionistique in Limoges. The now-familiar "bubble wrap" design was developed in the 1950s by two Canadian scientists, Hal J. Bubble and Jean-Jacques Wrap, whose company, The Bubble Wrap Corporation of Ontario, was later taken over by the Belgian multi-national Jiffé. Hence the "Jiffy" Bag, or – more properly – the "Jiffé" Bag. **Horace Nicholson**, author of *It'll Be There In A Jiffy! – The True Story Of The Jiffy Bag* (Short Books, £7.99).

QUESTION: Does anyone know the origin of the popular expression "Get a life"?

☐ THIS now-famous phrase was the slogan of an advertising campaign in the mid-1950s to launch a new brand of cigarettes called "Life". Cinema and TV commercials showed the young Ronald Reagan as a cowboy, pulling a cigarette from his holster and saying "Get a Life!" to a pretty young Indian squaw (played by Gina Lollobrigida). The end of the film showed them fondly embracing, each holding a "Life" cigarette. The campaign was a commercial disaster and the new brand was discontinued after only three weeks. **Dr Vijay Fotherington-Thomas**, Mumbai.

Answers, please, to the following: Can frogs yawn? Is it true that the crossword was invented in Mesopotamia? Is David Frost still alive?

POLLY FILLER

WELL, we've done it! We've bitten the bullet, and turned it off. From now on the Filler household is a TV-free zone.

"You are so brave, and daring and marvellous" said all my friends but I just point to the benefits.

Since I pulled out the plug my toddler Charlie has turned from a sulky, vegetative goggle-box-slave into an alert, creative, charming, bookish, renaissance child.

Instead of watching "The Feeblies" on BBCBBCB Digital Choice 7, he now plays backgammon, chess and a mean hand of bridge!

Instead of slobbing out in front of "Digiblades" on Nickleodious (!), he has just read *War and Peace*. For the second time!!

And instead of slumping with his bottom in the air three inches from unsuitable US imports like "Melinda, the Teenage Werewolf", he has composed an opera on the subject of the war in Iraq.

Not bad for the first week! And enforcing the TV ban is not nearly as hard as I feared. As I told my sceptical girlfriends, Rachel and Alison, you just have to be strong and tell the au pair that if the TV goes on, she goes back to Somalia–and, as I told her, they don't have fridges there full of Marks and Spencer's olives and taramasalata for her to help herself to whenever she feels like it!!

I WON'T deny that there wasn't a big tantrum when the telly first went off. My partner the useless Simon cried for three hours when he was told that he couldn't watch Pro-Celebrity Cockroach Racing from Thailand presented by Paul Ross and AA Gill.

But he eventually came round to the idea and even he is a changed man. He now sits staring at the wall for hours, which is a distinct improvement.

Let's be clear, I'm not running a dictatorship here and there are occasions when the television is allowed to go on. It would be silly to ban educational programmes for example and on Thursday I allowed Charlie to watch a discussion about the dangers of watching television on Kilroy–featuring yours truly!

And guess what? Charlie turned it off. That's successful mothering for you!!

©Polly Filler.

Are you a victim of the killer flu?

10 Tell Tale Signs That You Could Be The Victim of the World's Most Deadly New Disease

1. You are Chinese.
2. You've got a headache and a runny nose.
3. You're wearing a Michael Jackson-style face mask.
4. The Rolling Stones have cancelled a concert near your home.
5. There's a picture of you on the front page of the *Daily Mail* under the headline "House Prices Tumble as Killer Flu strikes Britain".
6. You're dead.
7. ...er...
8. ...that's it.

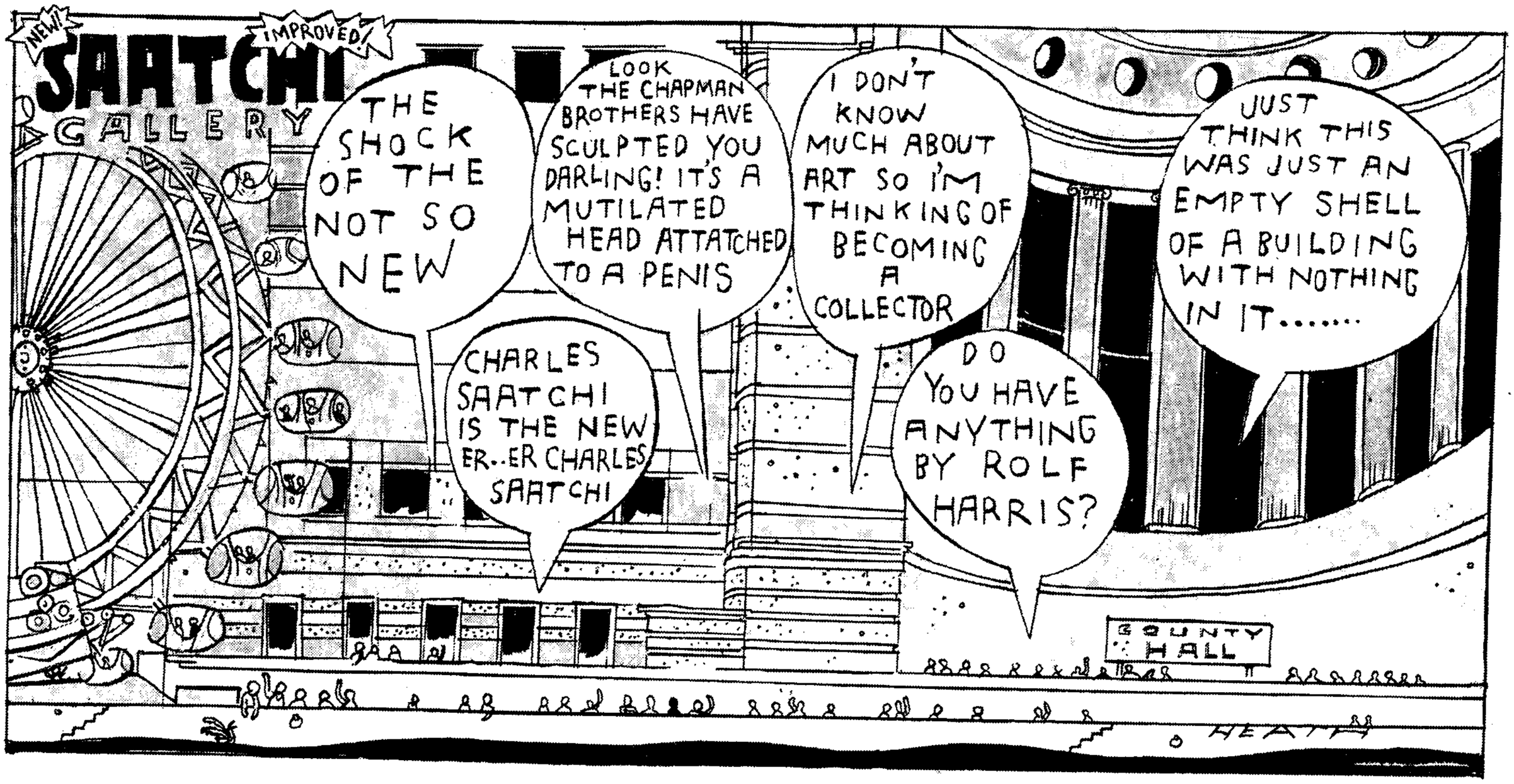
Which Top Fleet Street Doc Would You Want To Tell You That You've Got The Chinese Killer?

YOU CHOOSE

Dr James Le Fanu
1. Rides bike.
2. Heavy smoker.
3. Writes for *Telegraph*.

Dr Thomas Stuttaford
1. Was Tory MP.
2. Likes his wine.
3. Writes for *Times*.

Ring our special Sars "Doc-line" now, and help decide which of these media medics is the nation's favourite!!!
0896-4141300 (calls £1 a minute)


NEW!
SAATCHI GALLERY
IMPROVED!
THE SHOCK OF THE NOT SO NEW
LOOK THE CHAPMAN BROTHERS HAVE SCULPTED YOU DARLING! IT'S A MUTILATED HEAD ATTATCHED TO A PENIS
I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT ART SO I'M THINKING OF BECOMING A COLLECTOR
JUST THINK THIS WAS JUST AN EMPTY SHELL OF A BUILDING WITH NOTHING IN IT.....
CHARLES SAATCHI IS THE NEW ER..ER CHARLES SAATCHI
DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING BY ROLF HARRIS?
COUNTY HALL
HEATH

I AM THERE AS WAR ENDS

by our man in the Palestine Hotel **I.I.I. Mee**

AS the Abrahams Tanks rumbled along the open highway into Baghdad I stood and watched them with my own eyes. When the first battalion of the Kentucky Fried Marines led by Colonel Sanders (*subs: can you check this please?*) arrived in the main square I saw them personally out of my hotel window.

And when the statue of Saddam Hussein finally toppled to the ground it was me who witnessed it.

Yes, throughout the war the story has been the same – I was there.

Today an elderly Iraqi man embraced me in the street weeping profusely and handing me a garland of flowers, "Thank Allah that you are here," he cried. "A thousand blessings on you for coming to rescue us."

And the US military were equally grateful. A young American soldier, Corporal Ronald McDonald from the elite Taco Bell Rangers (*subs: check again please*), shook my hand saying, "It is an honour and a privilege to be the first member of the coalition forces to meet you sir."

Luckily the world's photographers were on hand to capture this defining image of the entire war against Saddam – me, standing in front of the fallen statue, hitting it with my shoe.

When the dust has settled, when the history books come to be written, and when I place my grandchildren on my knee, I will be able to tell them with pride – that yes, I was there.

© All Hacks who were there.

IT'S ALL OVER – AND THE PUNDITS WERE WRONG

by Our Conflict Staff **Phil Pages**

THEY SAID it would last for years and that there was no prospect of it ever ending – but last night the armchair experts had to admit that, after a mere 21 days, Julia Roberts's marriage was over.

Confronted by scenes of wild jubilation among her fans, the pundits were left red-faced.

Here's what they said

John Pilger: "This is a long-term engagement which I confidently predict will last much longer than the slavish American media believe."

Jonathan Friedland: "A short marriage is simply not on the cards. Don't believe the imperialist propaganda machine."

Max Hastings: "This is a blitzkrieg affair and as a military man myself I can tell you that it'll be over in less than 20 minutes."

WHO WILL RUN POST-WAR IRAQ?

Those top candidates in full

Mr Shufti Cruki (59) Charismatic Iraqi exile and chairman of the sadly defunct Cruki Bank of Jordan. Supremely able, Cruki is the first choice of the US State Department.

Ayatollah Ma'ad Mahdi (63) Charismatic Islamic fundamentalist leader of the powerful Complete Shi'ite Faction. Supremely mad, he is the sworn enemy of (see below)

Ayatollah Sunni An-Cher (73) Charismatic Islamic fundamentalist leader of the minority Sunni Delight Faction. Supremely dead due to being hacked to death by the above...

General Jed Bush (no relation) (63) Uncharismatic idiot who has no idea where Iraq is.

Saddam Hussein (73) Charismatic strongman and chairman of the Baa'staad Party who aims to restore (cont p94)

The amusing sayings of Iraq's hysterical new funster – Said-al Sahaf!

THE laugh-a-minute Iraqi Minister for Information has tickled the ribs of the world with his electrodes (*surely amusing asides, Ed*) and has kept the west laughing in the dark days of the war.

Here is a selection of his hilarious one liners.

- ***"The only good Kurd is a dead Kurd."***
- ***"Take these people away to be tortured."***
- ***"Shoot them all and bury them in a pit."***

©All newspapers

BUSH'S PEACE PLAN FOR ULSTER

by Our Northern Irish Staff **General Stormont Normont**

PRESIDENT BUSH flew into Belfast yesterday to be greeted by crowds of cheering policemen who were on double-overtime.

Said the President: "I am delighted to be here in Belfastland, the home of the shamrock and the bonny leprechaun.

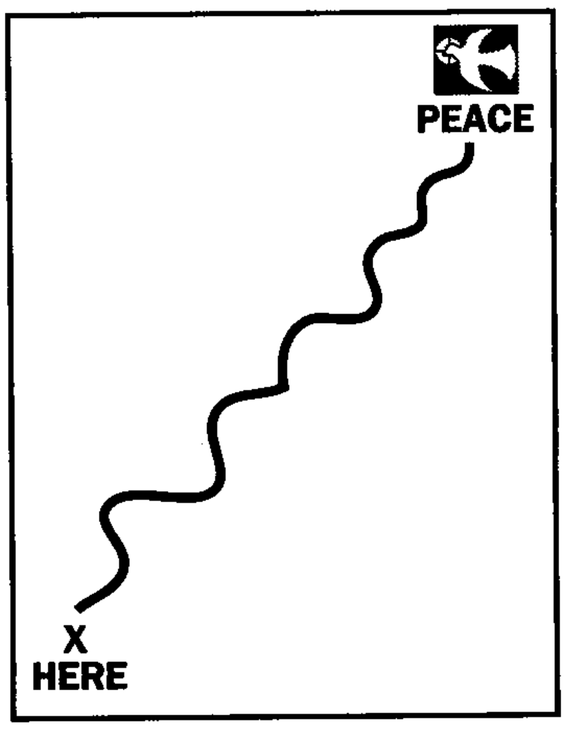
"I bring you today a message of peace. For too long your country has suffered under the tyranny of the terrorists, known as the IRAQ, under their hated leader Mr Gerry Saddams.

"But I am here to tell these folks that they may run, but there is no hiding place. They must give up their weapons of mass destruction, their Semtex, their agricultural fertiliser and their nuclear weapons.

"Failing that, they must expect the full wrath of the Coalition forces, as we send in the finest armed forces in the world to liberate the Irish people and allow them to rejoin the world community."

At this point, Mr Bush was interrupted by Tony Blair, who thanked him for his kind remarks and led him over to meet his friends Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness.

That Irish Road Map in Full



"Oi wouldn't start from here, sor, if oi were you." *Punch 1865.*

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Concorde

So. Farewell
Then,
Concorde.

Triumph of
Anglo-French
Technology.

You were
The fastest passenger
Plane ever
Built.

"Boom! Boom!"
That was your
Catchphrase.

"Bust! Bust!"
That is it
Now.

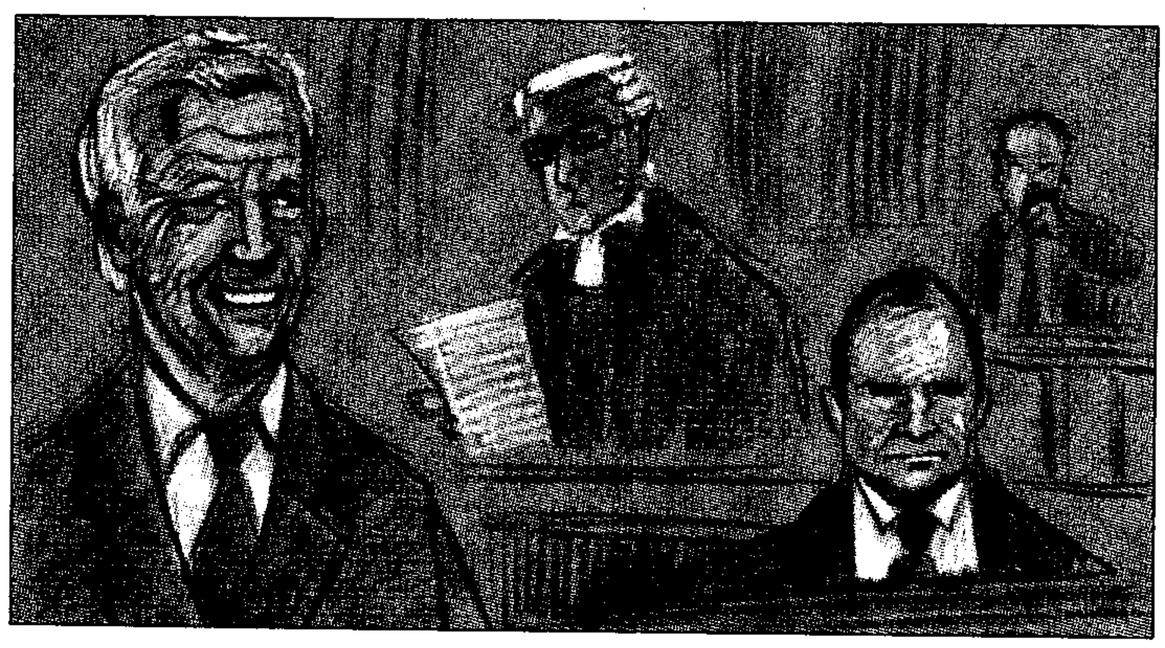
E.J. Thribb (71½,000 mph)

Baghdad marathon results in full

The 26 mile run from Baghdad to the Syrian border attracted a record number of entries and set a new world beating time for the winner.

1st S Hussein	1 min 48 secs
2nd B Hussein	2 min 10 secs
3rd RWS Hussein	2 min 33 secs
4th T. Aziz	3 min 10 secs
5th Chemical Ali Campbell	(Didn't finish)

(That's enough Marathon, Ed)



'MILLIONAIRE' MAN FOUND GUILTY OF GREED

by Our Court Staff **Milly O'Nair**

IN A sensational climax to the three-month long "trial of the century", a judge yesterday described one of the leading participants as "a sad man motivated solely by greed, who would stop at nothing to become extraordinarily rich".

The judge continued: "Mr Chris Tarrant has for some years been systematically attempting to relieve television companies of huge sums of money, simply by sitting in a TV studio asking silly questions such as: "What is the capital of France? Is it a) Germany? b) Robbie Williams? c) The Long and Winding Road? or d) Grapefruit Segments?"

Very Bad Court Drawing

Turning his gaze on the guilty party, the judge said, "Mr Tarrant, not only have you displayed avarice of the highest order, but you and your co-conspirators in the Celador TV company have shamelessly encouraged large numbers of the public to lust obsessively after the chance of winning a million pounds.

"In all my years on the bench, I have never been confronted by such a shocking example of how human beings can be so degraded. I therefore sentence you to the greatest punishment I can conceive – namely to remain for the rest of your natural life incarcerated in Studio B, Teddington, asking your pitiful and absurd questions. And may the Lord have mercy on your soul.

"I turn, finally, to Major Ingram, an unfortunate victim of Mr Tarrant's hoax upon the public. Mr Ingram, you have patiently endured this farrago of a trial, sitting there in your regimental tie and agreeable blazer. As a member of our gallant armed forces who, even now, are bringing law and order to the streets of Basra, you have suffered enough. Case dismissed."

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

MAJOR CHARLES INGRAM

Would you describe the part played by spoons in your life as: a) Important, b) Not very important, c) Negligible, d) Seminal?

That is a tricky one. I'd probably say 'A'. *(muted cough in the background)* Er, on the other hand, it could be 'B'. Yes, I'll definitley plump for 'B'. *(rather louder cough in the background)* Ah, yes, I think perhaps I might reconsider that answer. I wonder how 'C' would go down? *(stupendous fit of coughing from back of room)* Oh, no, now I come to think about, it has to be 'D'. What was 'D' again? Oh yes, my final and definitive answer to your first question must be 'D'.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

Can I phone a friend?

NEXT WEEK: Clare Short – *"Me and My Shorts."*

TONY BLAIR at 50 (THOUSAND WORDS)

By Our Woman at Saga Magazine
Valerie One-foot-in-the Grove

IT'S a milestone in anyone's life, and it's no surprise that people approach it with mixed feelings. But 50,000 words on the Prime Minister is a tough challenge for any hack. It's when you suddenly feel old at the thought of churning out all that stuff about toddler Leo, playing the guitar, boyish good looks, keeping fit, Cherie in her nightie, etc., etc.

And when you reach the big 50,000 you tend to think – what now? Do I stop or do I soldier on to 60,000, 70,000 or even 100,000?

But increasingly you are aware of your own mortality. Will I die of boredom before I get to the bit about Gordon Brown and the Euro?

But that is just being selfish. When one reaches 50,000 it is surely a time to reflect on how lucky one is to be paid to write this stuff at all. So 'Happy Birthday Prime Minister' and here's to the next 50 articles about you!

© *Gaga Magazine*

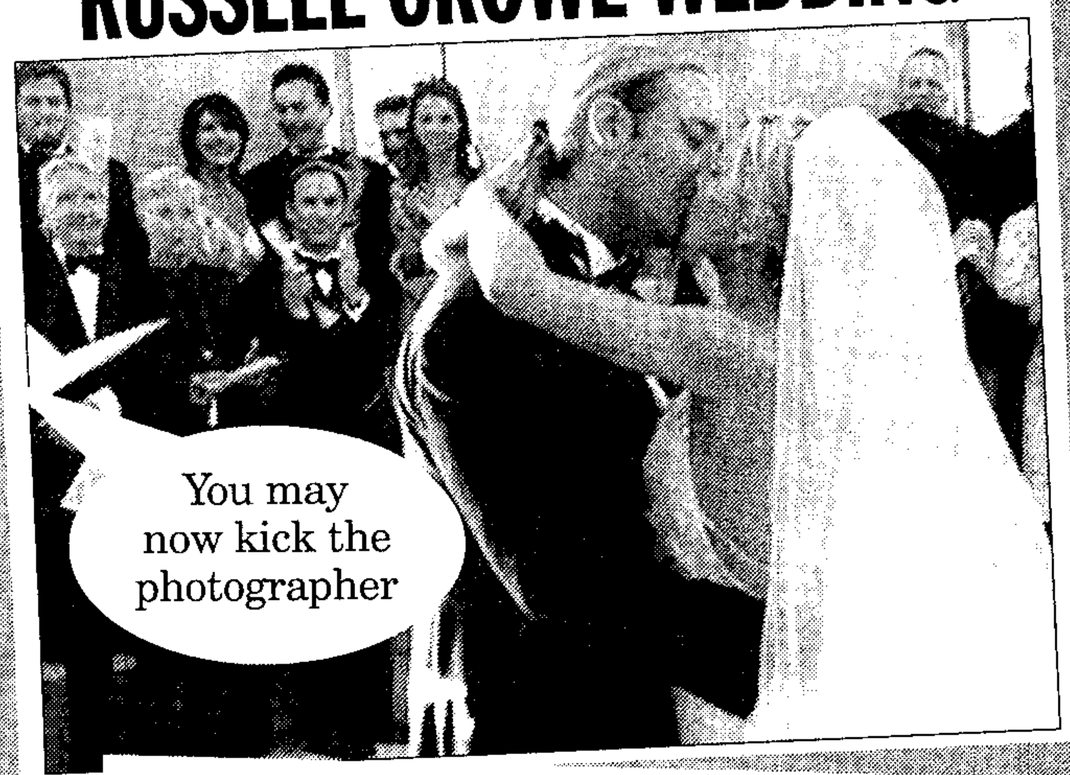
STARRY NIGHT VISION

THE WAR IN PICTURES

(surely some mistake? Ed)

UNAUTHORISED PHOTO

RUSSELL CROWE WEDDING



COOK MOVES INTO NEW HOME

"A question from the gentleman at the back – yes, you sir, in the cardinal's hat"

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 2003

Letters *to the Editor*

A Historic Boat Race

SIR – Your correspondent is incorrect in claiming that the famous "dead heat" of 1877 was the only occasion when the race was declared a "tie". There was an even more memorable (though now entirely forgotten) race in 1831 in which both boats simultaneously sank before reaching the starting line. My great-great-uncle, the Rev Winnifrith Hyde-Gussett (Eton and Balliol), later the Rural Dean of Hobart, where he published his classic treatise on the moths of Tasmania, was rowing stroke in the "Dark Blue" eight and would have drowned had it not been for the quick-witted intervention of Lord John Russell, who was watching the race from an upper window of the Star & Garter public house in Mortlake (now sadly demolished to make way for the local branch of The World Of Leather). The great statesman, who was at the time piloting the celebrated Great Reform Bill through the House of Commons, cast a handy wooden toilet seat into the river, just in time to save my distinguished relative from a watery grave. Floreat Oxonensia!

Sir Herbert Gussett
The Old Boat House,
Chorleywood.

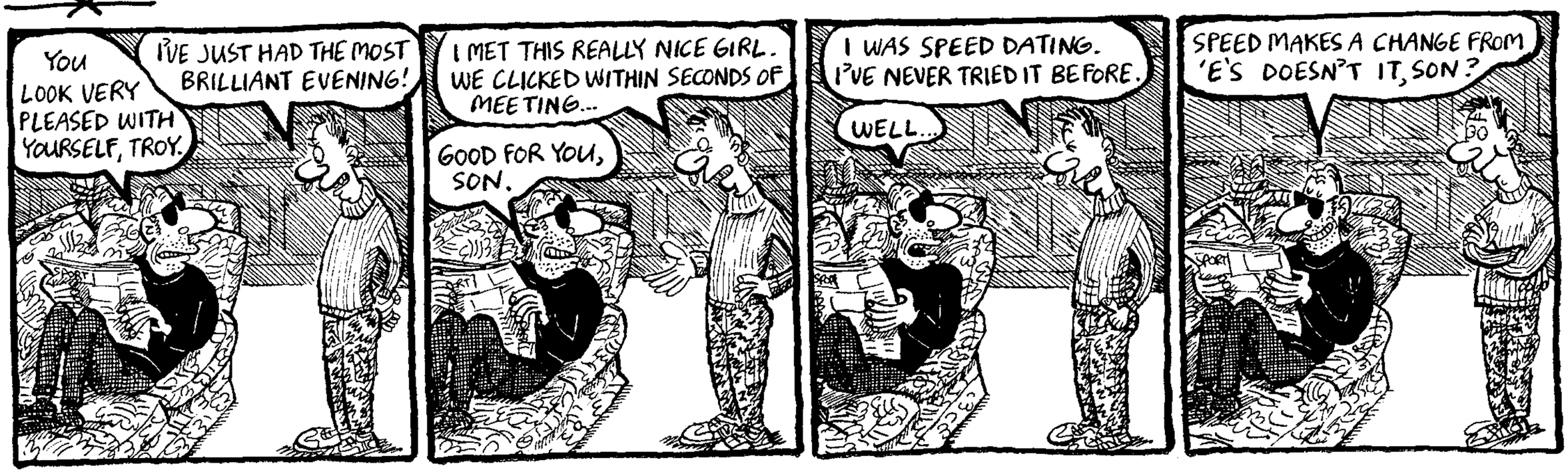
● *The Editor thanks you for your communication but regrets that the Daily Telegraph no longer publishes this type of letter, on the instruction of their marketing consultants, Hargleby, Mandelson and Pratt, in the hope of attracting a younger readership. The preferred style is as follows:*

SIR – I hope the losing Cambridge crew are not feeling too "Light Blue" after their defeat!

Mike Giggler
(Via email)

Celeb

LIGGER


YOU LOOK VERY PLEASED WITH YOURSELF, TROY.
I'VE JUST HAD THE MOST BRILLIANT EVENING!
I MET THIS REALLY NICE GIRL. WE CLICKED WITHIN SECONDS OF MEETING...
GOOD FOR YOU, SON.
I WAS SPEED DATING. I'VE NEVER TRIED IT BEFORE.
WELL...
SPEED MAKES A CHANGE FROM 'E'S DOESN'T IT, SON?

Literary Review

A star is corn

Personality Andrew O'Hagan
(Faber £16.99)

Child Star Matt Thorne
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson £9.99)

SHOWBIZ fiction has cleared out a little corner all to itself in the bookshops over the past couple of years. First there was D.J. Taylor's *The Comedy Man* (Morecambe and Wise-style TV duo). Then came Ted Heller's *Funnymen* (post-war US double act), closely followed by John O'Farrell's *This is Your Life* (contemporary stand-up). Gordon Burn's new one, *The North of England Home Service*, due next month, is about – well I never – an ageing northern comic. And now, published near-simultaneously, comes a brace of books by two bright young hopefuls (O'Hagan is a "Best of British" selection, Thorne one of the "New Puritan" mafia) on exactly the same theme: the teenage bright-light casualty.

Set mostly in the minutely documented late 70s to early 80s, *Personality* is chiefly remarkable for its disingenuousness. "This is a work of fiction", runs a prefatory disclaimer, which, however, "bears a relation to the lives of several dead performers..." Actually it bears an absolute relation to the life of a single dead performer, the late Lena Zavaroni.

Diminutive Scots lassie of Italian descent? Check. First break on *Opportunity Knocks*? You got it. Anorexia nervosa? There in spades. So intent is this shadowy pursuit that "Maria Tambini's" appearance on *Wogan* reprises several of the questions which our Tel proposed in a real interview with Miss Z.

Of course novelists can treat their subjects in any way they think fit (in mitigation *Personality* has a really weird ending, in which Maria stabs a venturesome stalker, a feat happily unthought-of by her alter-ego); but the scent that rises off the page is that which drenches, say, Andrew Motion's self-conscious tampering with biography (*Wainewright the Poisoner*, *The Invention of Dr Cake* etc): not extending the form in any plausible way but simply mucking about, blurring the line between fact and fancy for the sake of it.

At least, to do him justice, O'Hagan can write a bit, whereas Matt Thorne has for some reason burdened himself with a uniquely dreary narrator narrating in a desperately dreary style.

Twentysomething Gerald, Thorne's protagonist, is the erstwhile star of a 1980s teenage soap called *All Right Now!*, instantly consigned to the TV dustbin after one series and thereby leaving his fledgling career altogether washed up.

A decade-and-a-bit later our hero is in a baddish way: dumped by long-term girlfriend, "friends" with chick number two, chasing a third and living in a south London flat with some really kooky (ie dead boring) friends. And what does Gerald do, in between telling us about the brief history of *All Right Now!* – all masterminded by a self-important "dramaturge" named Nicholas Pennington – and his dysfunctional family? Why, he chunters tediously on. "We ordered our food", he remarks deathlessly of a night out. "The restaurant was usually crammed on a Thursday, but tonight it seemed quiet, maybe because it was still early."

There are thoughtful film buff digressions ("I don't know if you've seen the Wim Wenders film *Until the End of the World*" – no, as it happens) and eye-catching despatches from the creative-emotional battlefield: "I've been totally overwhelmed by my material, and while my life hasn't been going too badly, I've come to think of writing as a refuge, and only occasionally feel the need to interrupt the action."

A commendable resolve, this, Mr Thorne: sadly it still takes a groaning 373 pages for Gerald to sort his life out. Something of both O'Hagan and Thorne's motivation (and a whole shelf-load of their contemporaries' motivation too) can be traced back to a passage where Gerald notes that "so much of the art made by my generation... refers to stuff we absorbed while growing up." You can say that again!

Novels like *Child Star*, all two-page disquisitions on the things hip young people were listening to in the 80s, are frequently no more than a kind of archiving. As with their non-fiction equivalents (all those books about the kids programmes we watched after school, my old Chelsea soccer strip, fave grooves from 1979, etc) the anatomies of this paraphernalia from childhood are simply that – not so much a novel, or a study of recreational habit, but an *inventory*. Not the lad's fault, of course; but in this, as in so many areas of our teeming contemporary culture, I blame Nick Hornby.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

A Spoilt Boy: a memoir of childhood
Frederic Raphael

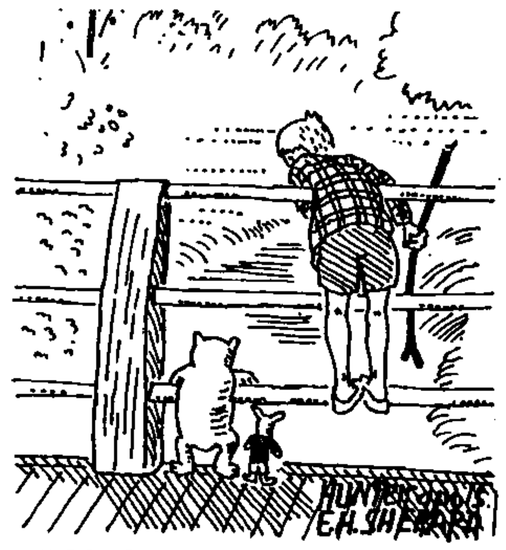
TO A smart Yankee boy brought up in the sophisticated purlieus of New York, the London of the late 1930s seemed unintelligibly strange. The taxis were black. The buses were, unaccountably, red. It was after one of these "bus" journeys that I was summoned to "tea" with my first genuine English chum, Jonty. I was neither shocked nor surprised to watch the apparently kindly mother of this pretty, flaxen-haired boy (so unlike the swarthy, big-nosed young Raphael) divide a six-inch long chocolate cake in such a manner that her guest received a chunk at least a quarter of an inch shorter than the three inches that equity, not to mention good manners, demanded. Was I hurt by this egregious slight? I cannot remember.

* * *

To be flung, unconsulted and afraid, into the chilly waters of an English public school was, inevitably, to suffer. Each morning after breakfast, for example, I was ordered to join the queue for the lavatory. As an only child I was unaccustomed to the rank odour of public toilets and, as an American, unused to the searing agonies of scratchy "bog paper". Frequently I was forced to hold my breath, flush the chain and claim what was a wholly bogus evacuation. All this required, as the saying has it, quite a cheek.

* * *

Do I exaggerate the depths of these humiliations? John Gross, who has spent a lifetime sucking up to the *goyim* and whose little memoir of this opportunist ascent discloses a childhood in which he moved so blandly and unexceptionably that he never attracted the smallest hostility, maintains that those who encountered prejudice must have provoked it. All I can say is that the Major Open Scholarship that I won in the winter of 1949 to St John's College Cambridge, against three thousand other candidates, largely by means of a brilliant essay on "Vanity is the most grievous of human vices" (the other questions I have unaccountably forgotten) was scant compensation for the Oxford award that prejudice denied (cont. p94)



"Oh, look! My fag packet is beating your lager can and Piglet's empty glue tube"

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ RUSSIAN "countess" Valentina Artsrunik has become something of a favourite of the diary columns recently, hosting a series of lavish parties to publicise the output of her new publishing imprint Artnik Media, which she runs with her fourth husband, the former armed robber John McVicar.

Expensive bashes were held last month at the Cabinet War Rooms and trendy Covent Garden hangout Sarastro to celebrate the launch of socialite Liz Brewer's *Party Bible* and the third volume (of a planned 18) of the Marquess of Bath's interminable memoirs, *Top Hat and Tails*, which takes the eager reader as far as the mad marquess's time at Eton.

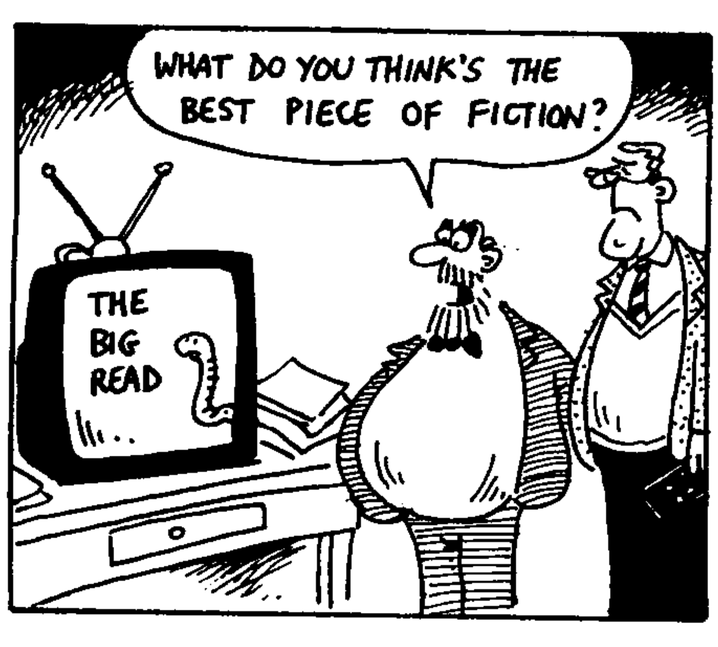
The lovely Valentina promises further titles by top authors including herself, John McVicar, Benjy "The Binman" Pell and, er, Nigel Dempster. Will the great Bath project ever see completion? Valentina has advertised in *The Bookseller* for an editor to work, *inter alia*, on the next three volumes. This is clearly a sensitive project. Artnik parted company with one experienced editor after the first volume and a second halfway through volume three, after the hack had the cheek to present his bill – which remains unpaid.

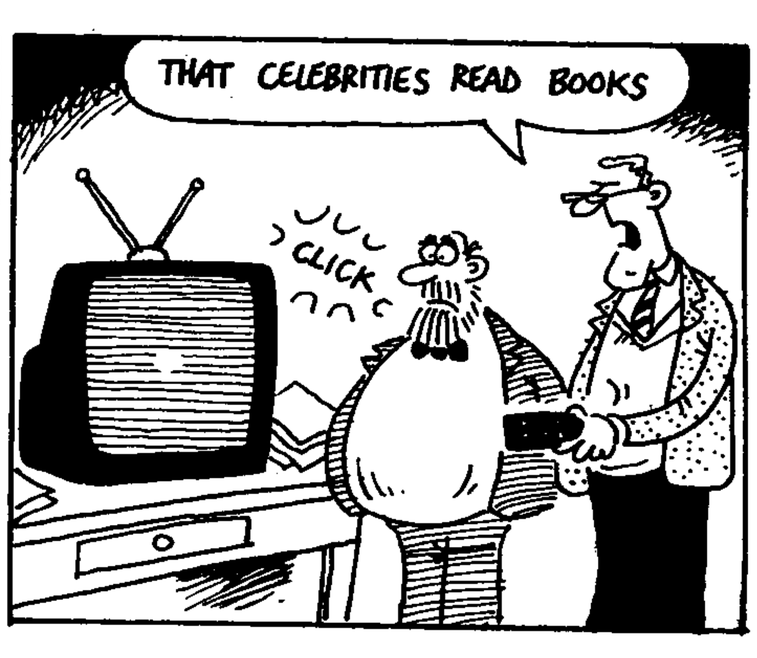
As Valentina tells the *Eye*: "I am just learning about the business and trying to do my best."

■ *AS THE* Grove *debacle rumbles on, the tortuously-titled* International Who's Who in Music and Musicians Dictionary – *edited by well-known musical eccentric David Cummings, who can be found most nights of the week at a classical concert somewhere in London, eating salad from a Tupperware box – heads towards a new edition.*

However, unlike the ostensibly scholarly approach taken by the Grove, *the* IWWIM&MD *is published by a vanity outfit called the Melrose Press. Melrose specialises in issuing over-priced and meaningless, but flattering, books like* 2000 Outstanding Scientists of the 21st Century, Who's Who in Asia and the Pacific Nations *and* Men of Achievement 1974 *which it then tries to flog to the people covered fulsomely within.*

A review for the last edition appeared on Amazon.co.uk shortly after publication, appearing to be a cautious plaudit for the tome, billing it as "a milestone in music reference, despite its faults". These faults include "the editor's tendency to be unnecessarily verbose and unnecessarily repetitive" and his "references... to the physical





features of singers", it being more usual to concentrate on their vocal attributes.

However, a closer examination reveals the true agenda: if you take the first letter of each sentence in the review, you end up with "CUMMINGS U MAD CUNT". The perpetrator is thought to be a former colleague of Cummings' from the London Coliseum.

■ WHEN Laura "Fubsie" Macy was appointed editor of the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, what happened to the British and European candidates who would have been at least equally qualified for the job?

A job can only go to a foreign national after it has been proven conclusively that no one in Britain can fill the position or even wants it. It would appear that the home-grown talent did not, and was never going to, get a look-in. One ex-Grove employee tells Bookworm that Fubsie was the choice from the off and that managers were securing her a work permit before they had finished the supposed recruiting process. What was it that made her so indispensable?

GREAT LOG ROLLERS

■ Choosing his six best books in *The Week* (22 March), writer and publisher Barnaby Rogerson picked two titles published by Eland Books and one by Sickle Moon. By a remarkable coincidence Barnaby Rogerson runs both Eland Books and Sickle Moon, thus giving himself a remarkable 50% plug rate on his half-dozen favourites.

'Bookworm'

. The Empress Suite .
. The Grand Hotel, Kings Road
Literay Lunch:
John Humphrys
Sponsored by
The De Vere Grand
Brighton Festival

Koch and bull

Persuader Lee Child
(Bantam Press, £12.99)

ALLOW us to introduce you to the long-rod penetrator, more commonly known as the APFSDS (Armour Piercing Fin Stabilized Discarding Sabot). It has hardly any relevance to the plot of *Persuader*, but that doesn't deter our returning hero Jack Reacher from explaining its operation in meticulous, almost affectionate detail.

"It's powered by its own little rocket motor. It hits the enemy tank with tremendous kinetic energy. The kinetic energy changes to heat energy... It melts its way through in a split second and sprays the inside of the enemy tank with a jet of molten metal, which kills the tankers and blows up anything explosive..." This continues in the same vein for a further paragraph, before Jack concludes: "It was a brilliant new weapon."

Probably the fairest thing one can say about Lee Child's seventh Jack Reacher novel is that you will come away with a much greater knowledge of ballistics than before you read it. In most good novels you come away having learnt something. Normally it's a moral lesson – life isn't fair, people are shits. In this case you learn the difference between a Glock 17 and a Glock 19. Personally I will also never forget that Heckler & Koch MP5Ks are "short and fat with big bulbous moulded handles" because Child repeats the phrase twice within 50 pages.

But scoff as we may at Glocks, Kochs and Penetrators, how many of us can remember a scintilla of detail from Dave Eggers' latest novel? The question is not whether this is a book of any literary merit – it isn't, nor was it intended to be – but why is it so effective? Child, an Englishman who now lives in the US, is a global sales phenomenon and every one of his Jack Reacher books has been optioned for Hollywood. People who should know better are reading him, secreted behind the dust cover of the new Don DeLillo. Why might this be?

Child came to writing from television. He worked for Granada as a night transmission controller for 20 years until they sacked him in 1996. In that time he watched a lot of telly, so when he came to write novels about an ex-military policeman kickin' ass in smalltown America, he simply transplanted the techniques of screen drama on to the page. Every one of his seven Jack Reacher novels is story-boarded with the precision of a TV thriller. Though verbally they may be drivel, dramatically they are flawless. Not only is this highly effective, it's also comfortingly familiar, like reading a cop show.

Reacher, too, is a brilliant creation, perhaps the first hero whose main characteristic is that he has no character. He retains a few vendettas from his days in the Military Police which come in handy as motives for one-man mercy missions, and a rather worrying obsession with his own physique ("I carry almost no body fat. All I've got in there are the necessary organs, tight and dense.") Otherwise he is an archetypal Hollywood tough guy in print, who speaks and thinks in the language of the action movie poster. ("Whatever. Bring it on.") His descriptive faculty is correspondingly limited: "The buildings had steep mossy roofs and were overhung with trees. The driveway was lined with trees. There were trees everywhere." But making our hero a supremely able automaton removes the whys and wherefores that can distract from the action. Would Jack really be able to win an eight-page fist-fight against a whale of a bodybuilder a foot taller than him? You better believe it – he's Jack, see.

The great thing about Jack Reacher is that from his name to his story to his risible one-liners to his almost sexual fascination with weaponry, he is a timely antidote to the type of Hornby/Lott man who has dominated recent fiction in all their stuttering, feckless, list-making self-doubt. Reacher knows how to strip a gun and how to strip a lady. He doesn't need to know anything else, which is exactly why the final pages of *Persuader* are so frustrating. Suddenly, almost as an afterthought, the author inserts a passage about Reacher's motives. Why, he is asked, does he like to bust so many crooked asses? Answer: "I like to see the right thing done."

No you don't Jack, you like to blow suckers away with awesomely complicated weaponry because readers love it.

"Boys – they never grow up so soon these days"

Pseuds Corner

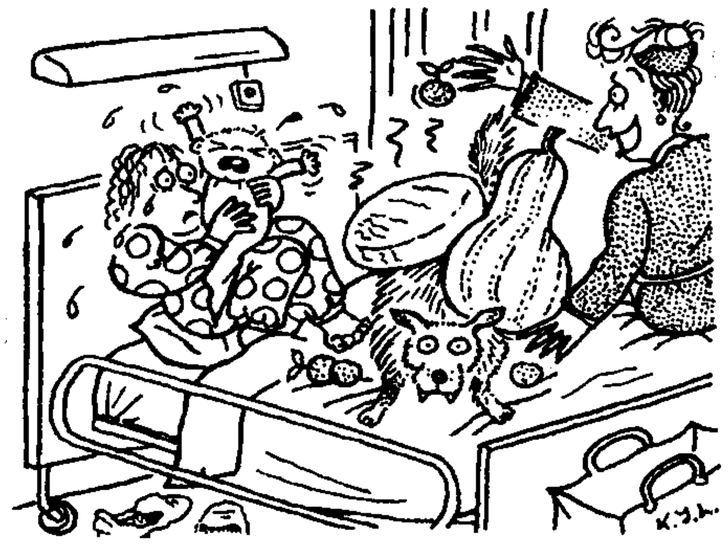
I am virus soul corp, hug me to this unreal/viral city which had not thought, death undone, so/short-term many fun-funding were this captive class

From the poem 'Through the buy-out jargon' by DREW MILNE, quoted in *Times Literary Supplement*

The truth about my name is that... I believe that people *choose* their names and that our names say a lot about what our destiny in life is. So I discovered that my birthday was October 3rd and Mahatma Gandhi was October 2nd. But when I discovered it I *knew* there was something to it. Once I started making music I started to understand that the political statements I make in my music and doing it in an honest but non-offensive way said a lot about his character and the peaceful protests. And my brother's also born on Martin Luther King's birthday. So I think it says a lot about my mother and my father's children and who we are. I got my name because I chose it in Heaven.

INDIA ARIE talking to Jenni Murray, BBC Radio Four Woman's Hour

I walked into the room three hours and 20 minutes after Truman's birth. I brought with me a gift bag in



which I had put goat's cheese, a stuffed animal, three or four very sweet minneola tangerines and, because they've always suggested womanhood to me, a perfectly formed butternut squash. Kate took one look at me and burst into tears.

PAM HOUSTON visits a friend in hospital, *Guardian Weekend*

...sometimes like a grandfather clock, sometimes like an alarm clock, sometimes a cornucopian goddess, sometimes a curmudgeonly landlord, sometimes like the blossomiest blossom, sometimes a knot of seaweed, sometimes a storm, sometimes a cradle, sometimes the bees and the pollen, sometimes a dagger.

How IMOGEN STUBBS 'feels as a mother', *Daily Telegraph*

Who has been the most influential person in your life?

Apart from my family and close friends they include philosophers such as Hegel and Nietzche; writers such as Dostoevsky and Primo Levi; journalists such as John Reed and Martha Gellhorn; political leaders such as Mandela etc etc.

'Lawyer of the Week' MARK MULLER, *The Times* **Law Supplement**

Pseuds Corporate

Think of this as a journey rather than 'pass/fail' test.

What will be needed is 'workshops' and 'exploration' rather than 'training'.

Note that there are some additional 'Leadership Behaviours' to come...

Those who don't live the values will be given the opportunity to learn how...

If we move away from 'command & control' to more distributed decision-making, we will need a different kind of 'organisational glue'.

We can move from 'parent/child' relationships to 'adult/adult' relationships... [*continues*]

BBC World Service 'Values & Behaviours' Workshop

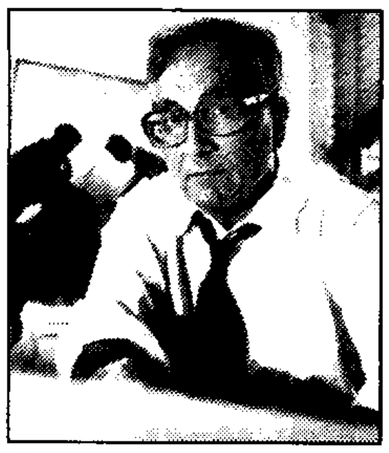
CONTRIBUTORS: Strobes, Kevin Sefton, Gwen Wright, Giselle Jones, Brian Whitehead, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

NIGER FORGERIES

FA from the FO



Seymour Hersh

SO WHO forged the documents that sought to prove Iraq's involvement in making nuclear weapons? Some light has been shed on this by the US investigative journalist Seymour Hersh in an article in the *New Yorker* on 31 March.

Hersh quoted a remarkable source – George Bush, president of the United States – who told congress in his state of the union message in January: "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

The International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) looked into this allegation. The only documentary evidence it was given to support it was a batch of about half a dozen letters and other communications between officials of the government of Niger in Africa and Iraq. The letters, dated between 1999 and 2001, purported to prove that Iraq had sought to buy uranium feed material, known as "yellowcake" from the government of Niger.

Hersh revealed: "One letter, dated October 10 2000, was signed with the name of Allele Habibou, a Niger Minister of Foreign Affairs who had been out of office since 1989. Another letter, allegedly from Tandja Manadou, the President of Niger, had a signature that had obviously been faked, and a text with inaccuracies so egregious, the senior IAEA official said, that 'they could be spotted by someone using Google on the Internet'."

The IAEA quickly concluded – and announced – that someone with access to Niger government letterheads had cut and pasted and forged the incriminating letters. So who were the forgers? The IAEA won't say. When its officials asked US government officials about the forgery "they had nothing to say". Throughout his long article, Hersh points the finger at British intelligence – MI6 – as the source of the forgery. The CIA, he wrote, "refused to respond to questions about the role of MI6".

Hersh concludes: "What is generally agreed upon, a congressional intelligence committee staff member told me, is that the Niger documents were initially circulated by the British, and 'the Brits placed more stock in them than we did'." He asked: "Did a poorly conceived propaganda effort by British intelligence whose practices had been known for years to senior American officials, manage to move without significant challenge through the top layers of the American intelligence community and into the most sacrosanct of Presidential briefings?"

Intrigued by Hersh's article, the *Eye* sent eight questions to the foreign office, which is responsible for MI6. Most of them listed the specific points in Hersh's article linking MI6 to the forged documents, and asked for comments on them. The seventh question was: Was MI6 in any way involved in the forging of these documents or in authenticating them? The questions were not answered individually. What the foreign office called a "generic" reply has to be read carefully.

"We remain confident of the statement in the government's dossier on Iraqi WMD that Iraq sought the supply of significant quantities of uranium from Africa. This was based on intelligence reporting. We understand that the IAEA separately acquired documents – not from UK sources – some of which were forgeries. We have no reason to doubt the information we have that Iraq tried to acquire uranium feed material ('yellowcake'). And as our dossier demonstrated there is other evidence of Iraqi efforts to restart their covert nuclear programme, such as the recall of Iraq nuclear scientists."

Experts in FOspeak will notice that none of the links made by Hersh between MI6 and the forgeries has been specifically denied (or even mentioned) in the reply.

The *Eye* asked the FO: "Has any inquiry been undertaken by the British government into the (Niger) forgeries"? There was no reply.

DEADLY CHAN OF EVENTS

AS predicted by the *Eye*, the high court has ordered a new inquest into the death of Harry Stanley, shot dead in 1999 by two police officers as he walked home from the pub carrying a table leg in a plastic bag.

Last year's inquest by the controversial Dr Stephen Chan (there have been several complaints to the home office about his idiosyncratic conduct of cases) disintegrated into a gross sequence of errors. Chan withheld expert firearms testimony, introduced details of Stanley's long-spent convictions which were irrelevant to the shooting and – crucially – denied the inquest jury any right to decide whether or not the two policemen who shot him in the head had acted unlawfully or negligently.

According to Tim Owen, QC for the family, home office forensic reports had established that 46-year-old Stanley was facing away from the two officers when he was shot – casting doubt on claims that he had pointed the table leg, which the officers mistook for a gun, at one of the officers.

Mr Owen argued that if a jury could not be sure that Mr Stanley took up a threatening posture, but was only beginning to turn in response to a challenge from the officers, then there was evidence that the pair had used greater force than necessary. Alternatively, there was evidence that the officers had failed to take reasonable care before confronting him. The trouble was the jury did not get to hear it.

The only firearms expert called by Chan was the officers' boss, who absolved his officers of any blame for the shooting. The jury never heard from the two other available independent experts – both experienced police officers with years of expertise in firearms training – who had each expressed concern at the way Mr Stanley was confronted. Even so jurors rejected a possible verdict of lawful killing in favour of an "open verdict" – suggesting they were not satisfied with the officers' account of the lead-up to the shooting.

At the high court Mr Justice Silber described the conduct of the inquest as "very disturbing" and said there had been "insufficient inquiry" into Mr Stanley's death. He said the coroner might be liable for costs – although Dr Chan cannot be traced and appears to have done a bunk. His former employer, the London borough of Camden, said it had not been able to make contact with him and would not therefore participate in the judicial review of Chan's conduct.

Lawyers representing both the Metropolitan police force and the officers involved (who had at the inquest encouraged Chan not to allow the family's firearms expert and not to allow an unlawful killing verdict) also did not mount any defence of the coroner's conduct. In fact, seeing the writing on the wall, the Met did not show up in court at all but sent a letter explaining its position, apparently to save on costs. Shame that wasn't the policy adopted at the first inquest. As Mr Justice Silber expressed his "deep concern" for Mr Stanley's family, he said the two officers involved also needed "finality".

LABOUR DONORS

KPMG

FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

WHILE Lord Sainsbury's latest £2.5m donation to Labour emerged through the fog of war, the party's other business funders were less in evidence.

As the electoral commission revealed, KPMG was the largest company donor in the last quarter of 2002. Its £60,000 gift beat most donations by individual businessmen, although Sainsbury, Gulam Noon and the late Paul Hamlyn chipped in more.

KPMG's donation was through "secondment of staff" rather than plain cash. (It also gave £9,694.17 worth of staff time to the Tories for good measure.) As well as giving staff to Labour, KPMG itself hired Labour staff: Toby Harris, aka Lord Harris of Haringey, is a paid KPMG adviser. Is this chumminess a good idea?

Last July Ireland's Institute of Chartered Accountants fined KPMG £270,000 for "inadequate application of professional scepticism during the course of the audit" after passing the books of Matbro, an Anglo-Irish farm machinery maker with a £47m hole in its fiddled accounts.

KPMG also used to audit the books of Comroad, a German software firm. Last April a new auditor replaced KPMG and found that 97 percent of Comroad's reported sales in 2000 came from a non-existent company. Former Comroad boss Bodo Schnabel was jailed for seven years for the fraud.

Last year KPMG also paid $45m to creditors of German drilling firm FlowTex. KPMG audited the firm's books, which were packed with imaginary sales.

In Belgium KPMG audited a speech-recognition software firm, Lernout & Haskie. This firm had $277m of non-existent sales in its accounts. The firm's chief executive was jailed pending extradition in the US. Shareholders are trying to sue KPMG while KPMG is trying to sue the software firm itself.

Last month it was revealed that KPMG paid $125m to shareholders in Rite-Aid, an American chain of chemist's shops. The firm, audited by KPMG, inflated sales by an incredible $1.6bn. Also this March KPMG said it would pay $125m to settle lawsuits related to private health firm Oxford Health Plans. KPMG audited the firm, which double-counted revenue on its books.

In October 2001 KPMG agreed to pay a $9m fine to the US department of justice. The fine came from allegations that it helped private hospital firm HCA defraud America's "Medicare"... Perhaps KPMG should forget about politics and focus on, er, auditing?

● **THERE may however be a reason for this debt of gratitude to "new" Labour.**

Nearly three years ago *Eye* 1006 exposed the government's generous gift to the big accountancy firms: a new law allowing them to become "limited liability partnerships" so their directors could dodge personal liability for their firms' disasters. (The move was loudly opposed by Austin Mitchell, one of the few Labour MPs who knows anything about accountancy firms).

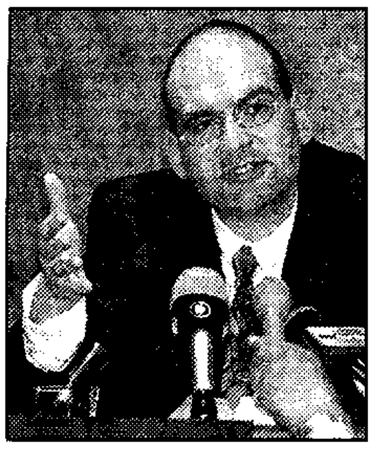
One by one the big firms snapped up the new opportunity. Price Waterhouse and Ernst & Young became LLPs in 2000 soon after the new structure was set up; and KPMG followed in May last year. There was some speculation that the last of the big four firms, Deloitte & Touche, had shunned the move out of some commitment to principle – but not for long. Earlier this year Deloitte "absorbed" Andersen UK after the latter's disgrace for its connections with Enron. The "absorption" was carefully worked out to protect Deloitte directors from any Enron writ, but its better to be absolutely sure. Deloitte & Touche is now an LLP.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

WATT'S THE PROBLEM?

DOUGAL WATT, the British accountant who blew the whistle on widespread corruption and nepotism in the European court of auditors, the chief financial regulator of European institutions that modestly describes itself as the "financial conscience of Europe", is about to be sacked.

Mr Watt has to appear in Luxembourg at the end of this month to answer charges that he made "unsubstantiated allegations" about the court of auditors, of which he was an official, to newspapers and to members of the European parliament. Looking back on the year since he first made these allegations, Mr Watt notes that many of them have been substantiated and even acted upon.



Paul Van Buitenen

A former member of the court, Mrs Kalliopi Nikolaou, has been recommended for prosecution for nepotism and fraud. The "weighting system" of overpaying commissioners has been stopped – almost entirely due to Mr Watt's allegations. One unhappy result for British commissioner Neil Kinnock was that his annual salary was docked by some £30,000.

Mr Watt has been spending most of the year trying to get people in high places to take his allegations seriously and is not at all happy with the outcome. The main British parties in the European parliament in Strasbourg have scrupulously avoided him. Claude Moraes, MEP for East London, Mr Watt's former constituency, who was once known as a bit of a champion of the underdog, passed the buck higher up to Eluned Morgan, Labour's representative on the European budgetary control commission, where the allegations appear to have stalled.

Mr Watt has engaged in a long correspondence with the Commons public accounts committee, urging its MPs to pressurise the government to open an inquiry into EU corruption and nepotism. But he has been told the committee has no powers over such matters and has been directed back to the European institutions that have so far refused to take him seriously (and even to denounce him as a bit of a loony).

This brush-off has annoyed and puzzled Mr Watt. When he was employed as a qualified accountant by the national audit office, which is responsible to the public accounts committee, he and at least three of his colleagues were "seconded" to the European court of auditors where they were all shocked by the atmosphere of nepotism and corruption. This experience, suggested Mr Watt, should alert the MPs on the committee to the case for a full trans-national inquiry. But the MPs and their officials remained unmoved.

His approach to HM treasury, which contributes so much taxpayers' money to Europe, was equally futile. None of these bodies showed the least interest in Watt's main allegation: about the corruption in the tobacco trade in Europe, which led, he alleges, to the suicide, possibly murder, in 1993 of the former European commission official responsible for tobacco, Dr Antonio Quatraro.

Mr Watt's long campaign has been highly praised by Paul Van Buitenen, the Dutch accountant, whose book on the EU's failure to deal with internal corruption led to the fall in 1999 of the entire European commission under Jacques Santer. Mr Van Buitenen described Watt's work as a "very good overview of many issues which should get everyone of commonsense interested to investigate". Mr Watt's reward for this is likely to be dismissal, the loss of his pension and a bleak future in which he is likely to be shunned by all employers in the areas where he has experience.

MMR

STUDY AID?

A CONTROVERSIAL new study to be published in the US claims to have found a link between the MMR triple jab and autism and other neurological disorders.

The study, to be published in the Journal of International Pediatrics, is by Dr Mark Geier and David Geier, who examined the US register of vaccine reactions, known as the Vaers database, for adverse events reported in children after they were given an MMR jab.

They found "statistically significant" increased relative risks of autism, mental retardation and brain damage following MMR in cases reported within five to 10 days of immunisation. With cases reported over a longer period, the authors conclude that MMR may not be a "primary" cause.

The authors caused a storm of controversy in the US with previous work finding a link between vaccines containing mercury and autism. Although the debate about mercury-based thimerosal in vaccines like DTP, diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough, has been muted in this country, in the US the preservative is at the centre of a multi-billion lawsuit.

Details of the MMR study have emerged in an open letter to Hillary Clinton, who is involved in the US National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (a far more generous scheme than that operated here because in the US pharmaceutical companies have to pay into it).

In the letter the authors say: "We have concluded in our studies that a causal relationship exists between mercury from thimerosal in childhood vaccines and neuro-developmental disorders. We have also had a peer-reviewed paper accepted for publication which showed that the MMR live virus vaccine may have also contributed to the ongoing epidemic of autism. Our best estimates are that the thimerosal contributed to about 75% of the cases of neuro-developmental disorders while the MMR contributed to about 15%. The remaining 10% of the cases were related to mercury in Rhogam, a shot given to Rh-negative women, and to other sources of neurotoxicity."

The Geiers' papers may be doubly helpful to parents mounting legal challenges over MMR here in the UK. As well as finding a possible direct link between MMR and autism, the basis of the UK MMR legal action is that the triple live virus jab can affect children whose immune systems are already compromised. Mercury is one of several things infants can be exposed to, including antibiotics or infection, that may influence the way their bodies' immune systems respond to live viral vaccines.

While scientists and lawyers will no doubt argue over the Geiers' MMR paper, one of the first quadruple jabs against measles, mumps, rubella and chicken pox has been given a clean bill of health by researchers at the University of California Los Angeles Center for Vaccine Research. The new jab tested on about 3,000 children aged between 12 and 23 months, was also said to have worked as well as MMR, coupled with a separate chicken pox vaccine. The research, supported by manufacturer Merck, was presented at a conference in Italy last week.

CAPITA

LEARNING THE HARD WAY

THE government's favourite private contractor, Capita, attracted remarkably little criticism for its part in the recent education scheme fraud fiasco, which is believed to have cost more than £100m of taxpayers' money.

Most of the blame in last week's report by the Commons public accounts committee into the debacle was laid at door of education ministry officials who were said to have taken short cuts and ignored warnings that the so-called individual learning accounts (ILA) scheme was open to abuse.

The multi-million ILA programme was the government's flagship adult learning scheme, designed to persuade the unemployed and those with few qualifications to take IT and other work-related courses. But it collapsed after it emerged that thousands of bogus claims were being made. Police investigations continue and so far 60 people have been arrested and 14 charged.

Capita got a clear run at the contract to manage the scheme in June 2000 after other bidders dropped out – largely because of the limited time available to get it up and running by September. As with many private partnership agreements, it transpired that Crapita enjoyed the profits while the department bore most of the risks because of insufficient clarity in the contract about how risk was to be shared.

The report found that the Capita system was never properly monitored – even after it emerged that education providers no longer had to be accredited – and that the company should have done more to insist that its emerging concerns about risks of fraud were taken seriously. Although it provided weekly, monthly and annual activity reports, Capita did not include "exception reports" highlighting unusual activity such as large payments. So they weren't noticed until too late.

In the event Capita got all but £1m of the agreed £55m contract and told MPs it had still made a profit but suffered some loss of reputation. Not that that has affected its relationship with the department for education and skills or ministers. It has just won a new £62m contract to administer the Teachers Pensions Scheme for another seven years.

STOP PRESS: As the *Eye* went to press it was announced that Capita had been named Company of the Year at the 2003 Royal Bank of Scotland Sunday Times Business Awards. Incredible… but true.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **DERBY COUNTY:** Thanks for all the letters (some of support, some not) from Rams fans – and for the lurid speculation about the so-called "serious allegations" that led to the suspension of manager Ron Gregory. Many suggest the only man who knows the truth about the allegations is club chairman Lionel Pickering.

Mr Pickering has not been very popular at the club since he intervened last year to stop the sale of top players Malcolm Christie and Mart Poom. The price offered for them was around £9m – rather more than the £4.6m paid when the players left Derby a few months later. The club is now at least £30m in debt and with the bottom falling out of the transfer market few supporters can see how Mr Pickering can get the Rams out of the mess, even if he proceeds with his imaginative schemes with the former boss of Coventry City, Brian Richardson, with funding from the Bank of Tripoli.

But they would be wrong to underestimate the ingenious Pickering. He used to own the Derby Trader group of papers, and despite oft-proclaimed socialist views he grew increasingly irritated dealing with trade unions. One day he summoned some of his staff and presented them with messages for the others announcing that trade unions were from that moment derecognised.

This greatly enhanced the profits of the group, which Mr Pickering eventually sold at a hefty profit, enabling him to buy a majority shareholding in Derby County FC from that other ambitious football king, Robert Maxwell. Recently Pickering "outsourced" the club's restaurants and catering to a firm called Lindley Catering. Many fans wondered what advantage could accrue from this dramatic move, until it emerged that Katie, daughter of Derby County's former chief executive Keith Loring, was employed by Lindley. She has since been dismissed by the caterer and now works in Derby County's press office.

In the City

CHELSEA chairman Ken Bates' worst fears may be about to be realised. South African Stanley Tollman – his old pal, business partner, benefactor and suspected secret shareholder in the premiership club – could soon have the first of many days in court fighting extradition from Britain on US fraud and tax evasion charges.

It is understood that the home office has cleared the way for the extradition process to begin by accepting that the US request for Tollman can go forward. The next stage is for the crown prosecution service (CPS), Scotland Yard and Bow Street magistrates to agree on the wording and timing of a warrant for Tollman's arrest.

Tollman, a former Chelsea director, was first indicted in New York a year ago accused of swindling banks out of $42m through a scheme whereby he and his partner Monty Hundley bought back for ten cents on the dollar loans made to his collapsed Days Inn hotel chain.

Tollman knew the feds were coming and fled to London where he has a Belgravia penthouse home. He was seen with Bates both before and after the indictment was announced. Tollman has continued to resist pressure to return even when his son Brett was indicted.

A new indictment last November also accused Tollman of evading US taxes on $30m paid as fees to bank accounts in Guernsey. In Guernsey, Tollman, like Bates (they go back to the early 70s), was a client of Royal Bank of Canada and Patrick Murrin – the former Saffrey Champness accountant who has always represented the mystery offshore shareholders in Chelsea Village who at one time owned 67 percent of the soccer club's parent. It was that Guernsey connection that lies behind the suspicion that Tollman is or was a secret Chelsea owner.

Tollman's tax troubles were also suggested as the motive for last year's break up of the Murrin-controlled stake – by then reduced to 26 percent – which saw Bates buy half and the rest split between five offshore companies run out of Murrin's new company, Harbour Management, which also handles Bates's stake. It is not thought that this convenient reshuffle has altered the beneficial anonymous owners who have always backed Bates.

The US authorities are pressing Murrin and the Guernsey authorities for information about Tollman's dealings and assets. These could not only feature in his trial but any assets might be seized on conviction.

Bates is also a possible witness at any Tollman trial. He was a shareholder in Chelsea Acqusitions, one of the companies used by Tollman in 1994 to buy back debt on the cheap claiming that the buyers were independent European investors. Bates claims he was unaware that his name had been used and knew nothing of the Tollman scam. The publicity is unlikely to do anything for Bates' blood pressure.

WHAT is going on at Hanover Capital, formerly Oxygen Holdings and Tera Group, since *Eye* 1073 detailed the less than reassuring CVs of those behind the plan to relaunch Hanover as a mining star after its dot-com and hi-tech flops?

First, shellmeister Michael Edelson quit as chairman days after the article appeared, claiming it was always his intention to do so and, anyway, he remembered he had no mining experience.

Then it emerged that despite being part of the Serious Farce Office investigation into the disappearance of £33m from Izodia where he was a director, Peter Catto was to receive £50,000 in cash pay-offs from shell companies with which Hanover was doing deals.

Hanover has no cash to speak of and pays bills by issuing shares to its creditors and those of the three shells – Underwriting & Subscription, Prestige Publishing and Room Service – it has taken stakes in helped by Catto. The problem is that few want the shares – suspended at 4p against the 10p at which they were issued for gold mining interests in the West African state of Mali and the high of 14p.

Number crunchings

3% ■ growth rate Gordon Brown predicted for UK economy this year

3 ■ number of times he has had to revise that opinion

£30bn ■ amount of money government will have to borrow as a result

Last week saw a torrent of bad news culminating in the suspension of the shares. First it emerged that Hanover had not been able to place shares issued to the former Finnish owners as part payment for loans. Then it was belatedly announced that Stephen Lumb had become chief executive – Lumb left a trio of smoking stock market ruins in South Africa. Shortly afterwards accountants Grant Thornton quit as nominated advisers and with no successor the AIM listing was suspended.

Why did Grant Thornton – only appointed in December – quit? Was it perhaps the failure to disclose Lumb's appointment as a director for three weeks? Or was it perhaps that no previous South African directorships were disclosed to AIM as required by even its rules? As the *Financial Mail* of Johannesburg recalled, Lumb had been "the guiding light behind disasters like Igaming, Oxbridge Online and Essential Beverage". Yet there was no mention of these companies. Interestingly, co-director Ronald Lowenthal did list his South African directorships even though these were less than flattering.

By remarkable coincidence the Joburg regulators suspended dealings in Igaming in August 2001 because it had no nominated sponsor. By another coincidence the Lumb-directed casino company had previously acquired stakes in two shells – Oxbridge and Essential.

Lumb's published details also omitted two companies which were dissolved last year and another, the Igaming linked Cybergaming.com, dissolved this year.

Perhaps Grant Thornton was also concerned about the continuing mystery as to who owns 44 percent of Hanover. In a bid to "clarify the position" last month, the company revealed that 33m shares held in offshore companies were really owned by "various social structures" representing "tribal interests" in Mali. Exactly who are their "appointed representatives" was not clarified. Hanover denied any Mali government official or Hanover director was a shareholder. But how would it know given the shareholdings are offshore? And who are the unnamed "representatives" who dreamed up the complex offshore structures for the "tribal interests"? They clearly are not in Mali but are known to Lumb.

Even by AIM's woeful standards this is unacceptable. Before the Hanover Capital listing is restored the Stock Exchange should insist on full disclosure about the ownership and explain the failure to disclose the appointment of Stephen Lumb and his full background.

SO THE phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed is shaking the dust of an ungrateful Britain from his shoes and taking up residence in Switzerland. But that will not end his problems with the taxman who believes he should pay far more than the £240,000 tax a year he had agreed under a now scrapped five-year deal.

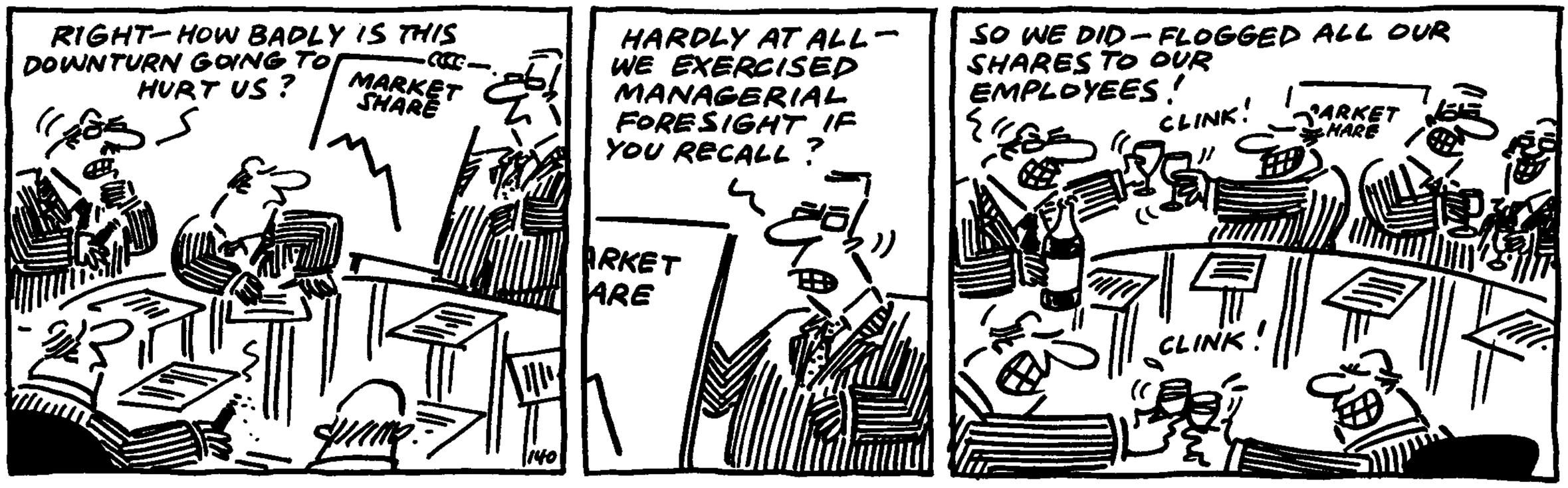
Fayed may be resident in Switzerland for tax purposes from now on, but that does not remove his existing tax liabilities from 2000 to 2003. He was UK resident for those years and now is likely to face six figure tax bills for each year.

How would the Revenue collect given that everything Fayed owns in Britain is in offshore company names? Once the tax debt was confirmed it could seek judgment. That judgment for a legal debt could not be enforced in Switzerland or against the offshore-owned UK assets such as Harrods, Fulham FC or his London, Surrey and Highland properties. But the Revenue could make Fayed bankrupt and so force his resignation as a director of Harrods, Fulham and the Paris Ritz — a British company. And if it wanted to play real hardball, it could consider a criminal prosecution for non-payment. Fayed may still have to pay – eventually.

It looks like Fulham fans will be seeing less of their chairman at future games. Tax experts suggest those going non-resident stay out of the UK for all of the first year and never visit for more than 90 days in any one subsequent year. So Momo will be waving his rattle less frequently at Fulham games next season.

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

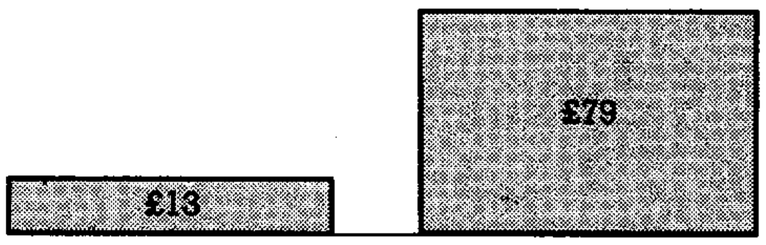

RIGHT—HOW BADLY IS THIS DOWNTURN GOING TO HURT US?
MARKET SHARE
140
HARDLY AT ALL— WE EXERCISED MANAGERIAL FORESIGHT IF YOU RECALL?
SO WE DID—FLOGGED ALL OUR SHARES TO OUR EMPLOYEES!
CLINK!
CLINK!

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Bad news

Value of £100 invested two years ago in...



News company Reuters, whose CEO is Tom Glocer

Rival Dow Jones, whose CEO isn't

WHY do so many British judges, unlike their US counterparts, not treat fraud as a serious crime? How can an Old Bailey judge consider a prison sentence is not in the public interest for a serial offender who admits to stealing £1.75m? According to Judge Jeremy Roberts, it is because Stephen Hinchliffe – who stole possibly as much as £15m from Facia before it collapsed in 1996 – has just been released from prison for corruption and it has taken so long to bring him to trial.

Roberts – criticised in the past for lenient sentencing – is due to sentence Hinchliffe on 23 April but revealed his intention when the Facia chairman's plea bargain with the SFO was disclosed. The SFO believes Hinchliffe should do time fearing public criticism over going along with another Roger Levitt-style legal stitch-up.

It has taken seven years to get Hinchliffe into court on the Facia fraud because he fought the corruption case for six months, despite the man he corrupted, United Mizrahi Bank manager John Doherty, pleading guilty. Hinchliffe was jailed in 2001 and released this year after his sentence was cut from five to four years after Doherty won a reduction on appeal.

12 Number crunchings

- number of Concordes still flying
- number of hours between BA deciding to axe Concorde and Richard Branson announcing "plans to take it over"

Hinchliffe was initially expected to be tried on the Facia charges in September 2001. That date was delayed to January 2002 and then April 2003 at his request because he wanted to be tried with his co-conspirator and faithful lieutenant Christopher Harrison who had been released from doing time in Germany for another Hinchliffe fraud. Hinchliffe was clearly prepared to plead not guilty despite the evidence and the risk, as with another serial conman Clive Smith, that his reward could have been a consecutive prison sentence for wasting taxpayers' money.

Hinchliffe – who pillaged companies before Facia but avoided prosecution – has played the legal game since 1996 to avoid responsibility for his crimes. That it has taken so long to bring the Facia fraudster to justice is down to him. The prisons are full of men who stole a fraction of what Hinchliffe took to fund his jetset lifestyle but they may not have such clever lawyers.

Complex frauds by determined fraudsmen like Hinchliffe take time and money to investigate. They often require more than one trial. The Facia trial had to wait on UMB. Such trials are usually lengthy, mainly because of defence tactics. To then give the guilty a reward of no prison time is to question the SFO's very expensive role in investigating and prosecuting fraud. The Roberts message is: make it complex, deny everything, string things out... then offer a last minute deal and you can do the crime but not the time.

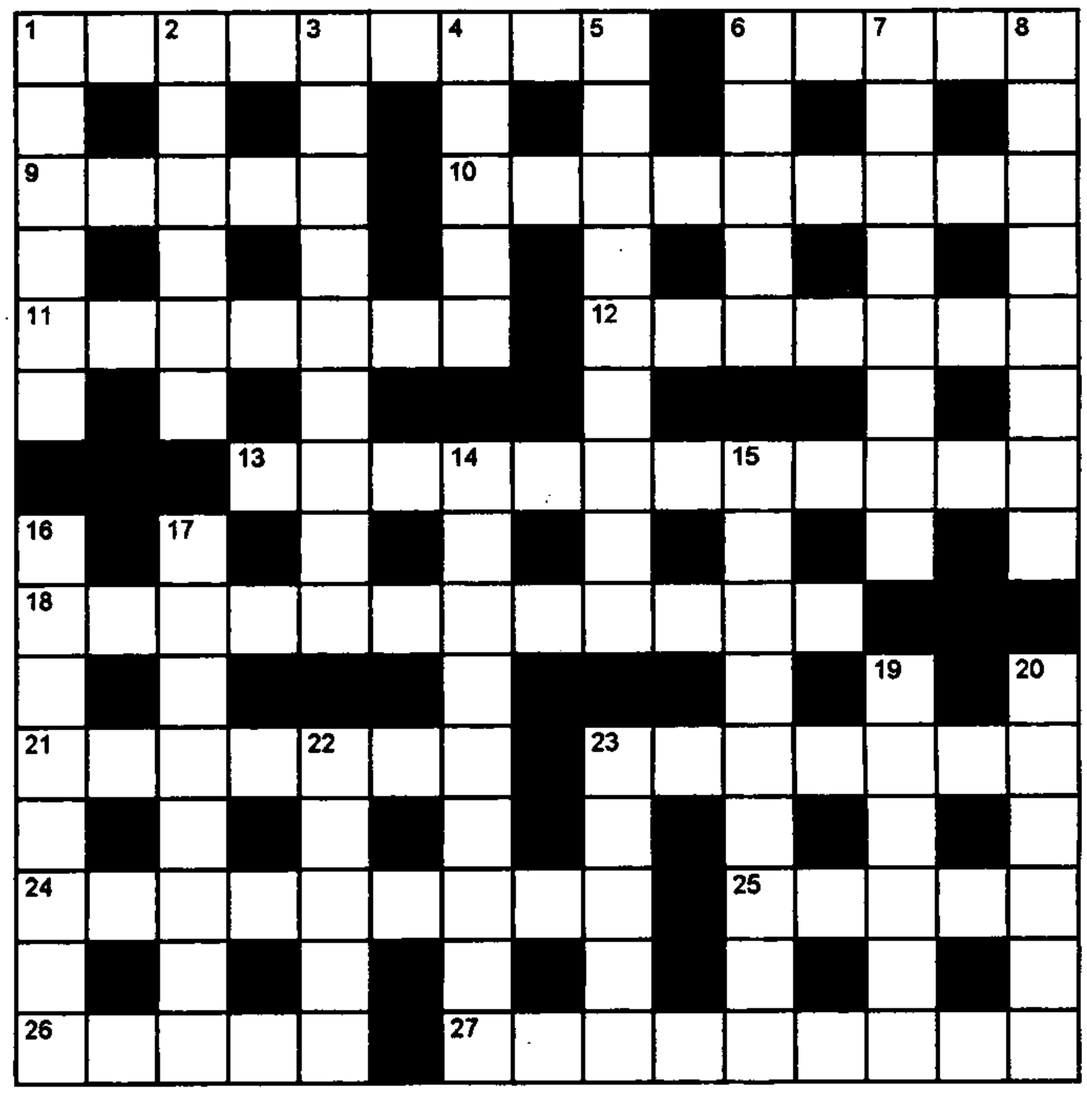
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 233

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 25 April 2003.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Scoffs double portion of crap that HH's sliced (4,5)
6 Bent prison's governor 'did an Archer' (5)
9 Back in the same place, MOAB removing round, cute creature (as seen on film) (5)
10 Give it all you've got but succeed only in making yourself go limp (5,1,3)
11 Liberal seat win gets you all troubled (2,1,4)
12 Tony Blair's wings benefit Labour? (7)
13 Ignoring Britain's and Spain's leaders, G W Bush left in a right awful bloody mess? (3,2,3,4)
18 Despised Americans with a need to act like destructive movie stars on location? (7-5)
21 Result of a lay the bloke had involving a Smartie (7)
23 Have sex with juvenile though not hard a lot (7)
24 What's going on in Iraq when Gore joins the party? (Al's first to quit, though) (9)
25 Not the usual 'Gazza' – drops head, seeing the light (5)
26 Swore arty must be to be farty (5)
27 Verbal diarrhoea for the most part is to evacuate gas (5,4)

DOWN

1 No secret left in the genital area, descriptively (6)
2 AC/DC's lead involved in "Balls to speed!" band member's outburst (6)
3 Colourful army game involving trouser squeezing one testicle (9)
4 Bend Archer's thing after love and kisses (well, one, anyway) (2-3)
5 "*Eye*'s the organ for me" gets Boris's rag (9)
6 Genuine, crap UK karaoke is entertaining (5)
7 Member of pre-UN organisation – joined for evil purposes (2,6)
8 '*Licking Balls, Getting on the Bone, etc*' follows biography (4,4)
14 Nuke river in Iraq – question going on engagement around one (9)
15 No problem getting the 'ayes' to vacillate like vegetables (4,5)
16 Key NI politician, one giving way to first sign of equivocation, getting the collywobbles (8)
17 Merrily dismiss the French (reaction of horror) – not up to the usual standard (5,3)
19 Milosevic's old power base collapsed with diminishment of Irish (6)
20 America's leader has no go-ahead to seize central Iraq – nerd! (6)
22 Arse taking journalist over (5)
23 It's hardly cool to deprive someone of a joint (5)

Crossword 232 winner: BOB OXTOBY

ACROSS: 9 Net profit 10 Eyeti 11 Extra 12 Paralytic 13 Euro MPs 15 Buoyant 16 Knuckle sandwich 20 Unhooks 22 Unroyal 24 Strike out 25 Caned 27 Odder 28 Peninsula.

DOWN: 1 Knee-jerk 2 Stet 3 Orgasm 4 Off-piste 5 Athrob 6 Feel good 7 Bestiality 8 Big cat 14 Rough trade 17 Knockers 18 Abutting 19 Half dead 20 Unshod 21 Sloppy 23 Recant 26 Noun.

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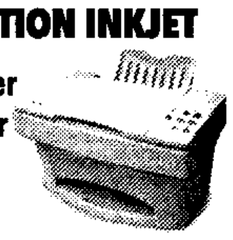

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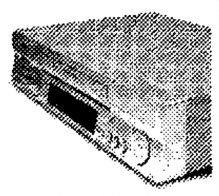

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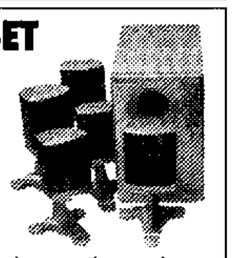

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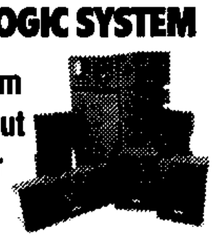

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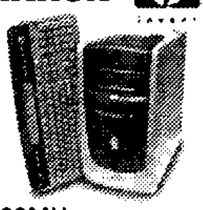

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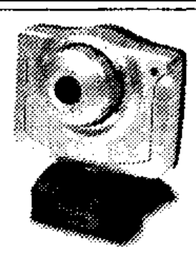

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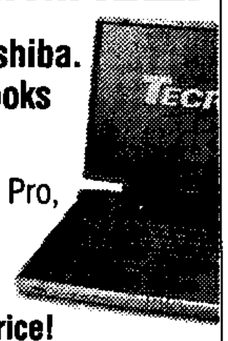

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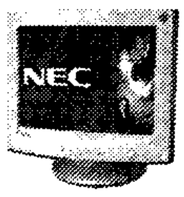

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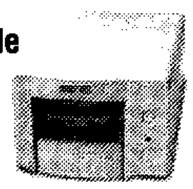

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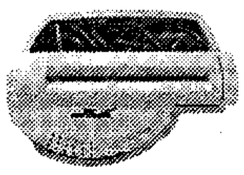

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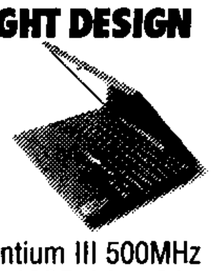

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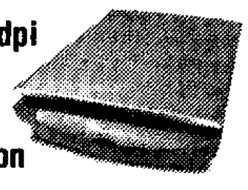

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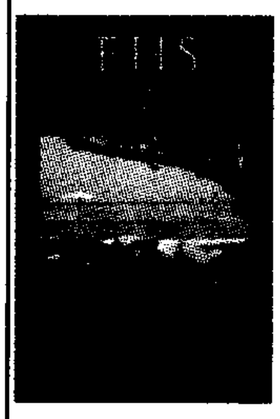

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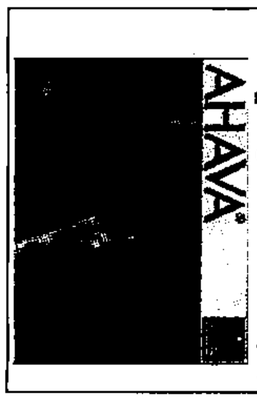

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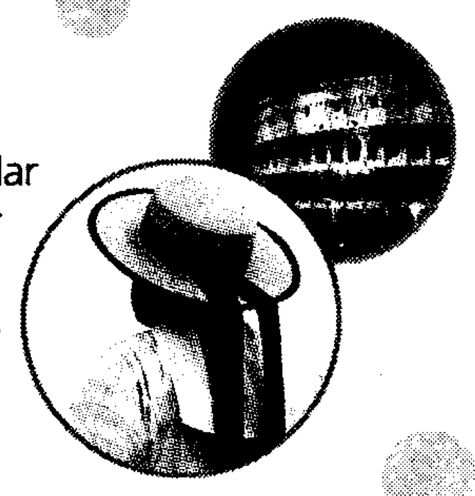

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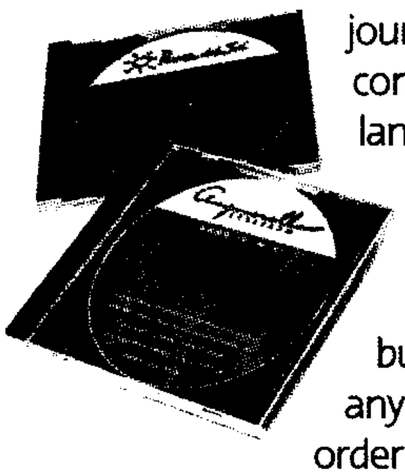

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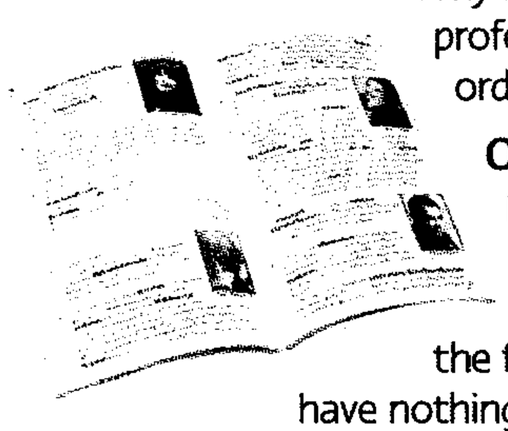

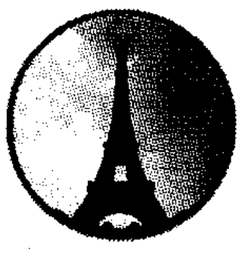

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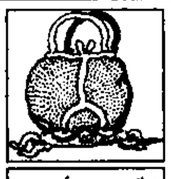

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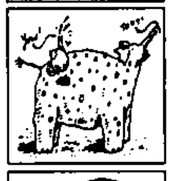

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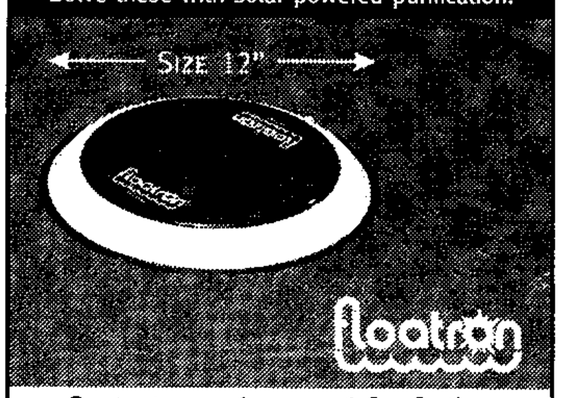

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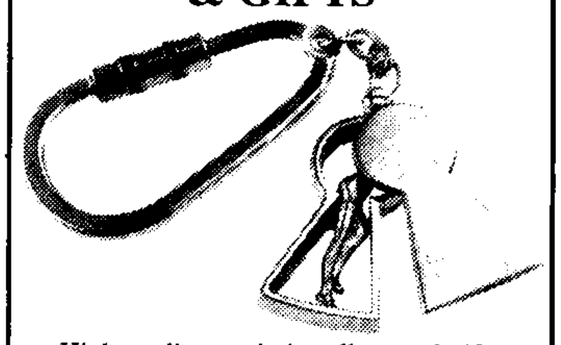

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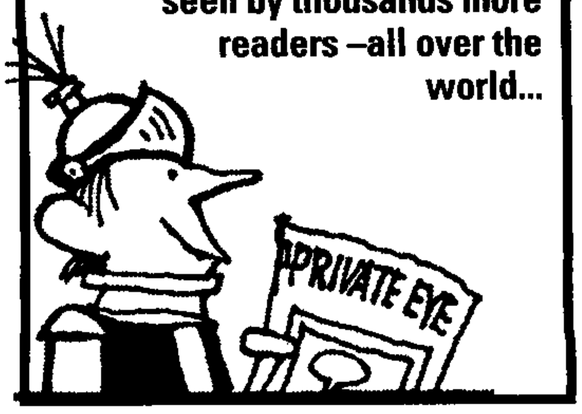

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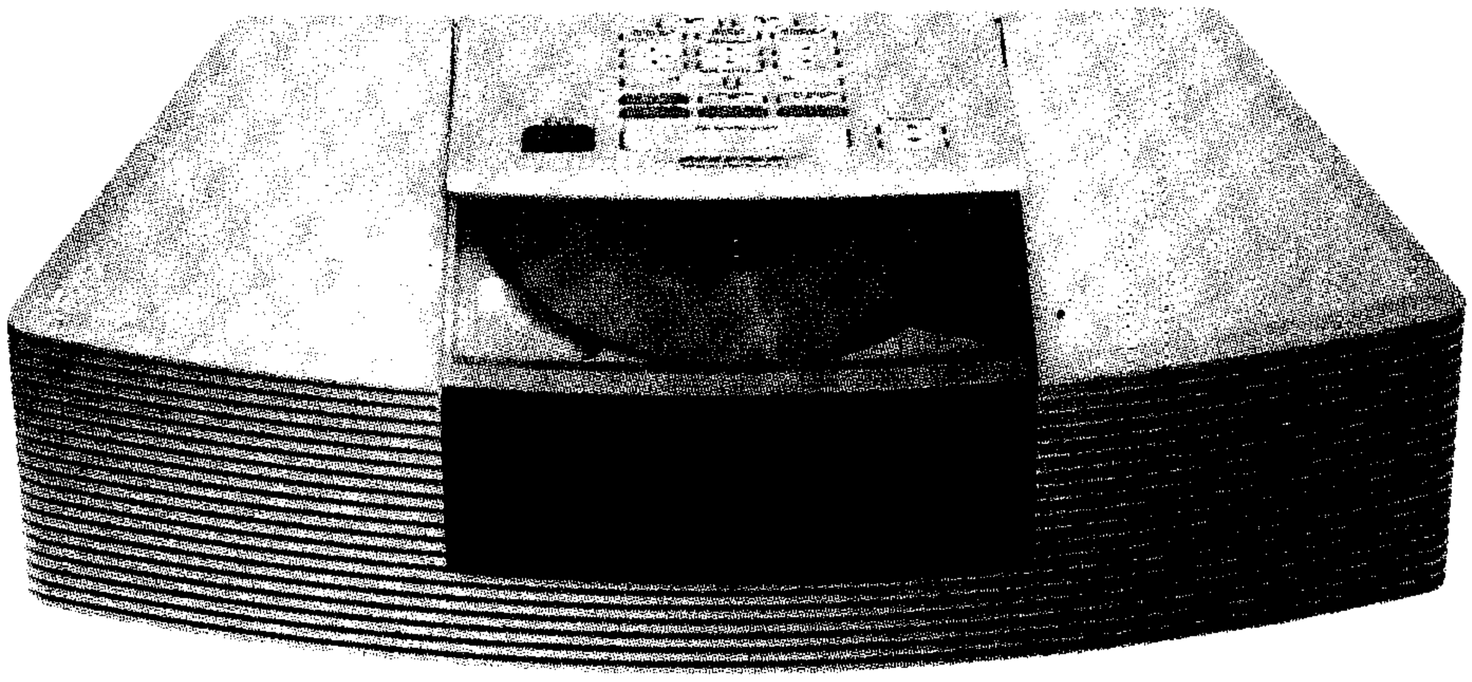

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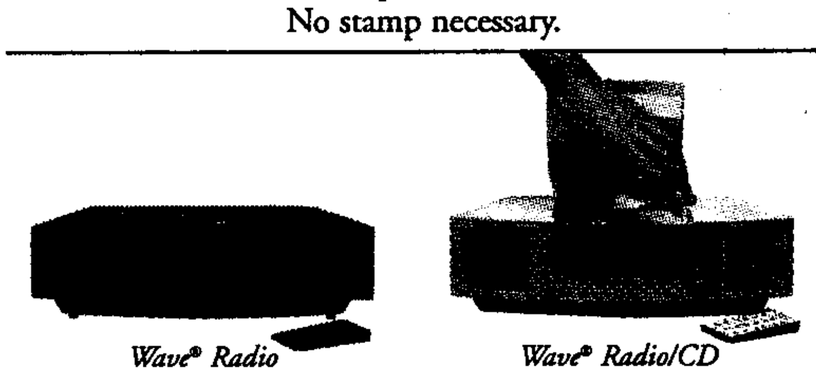

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